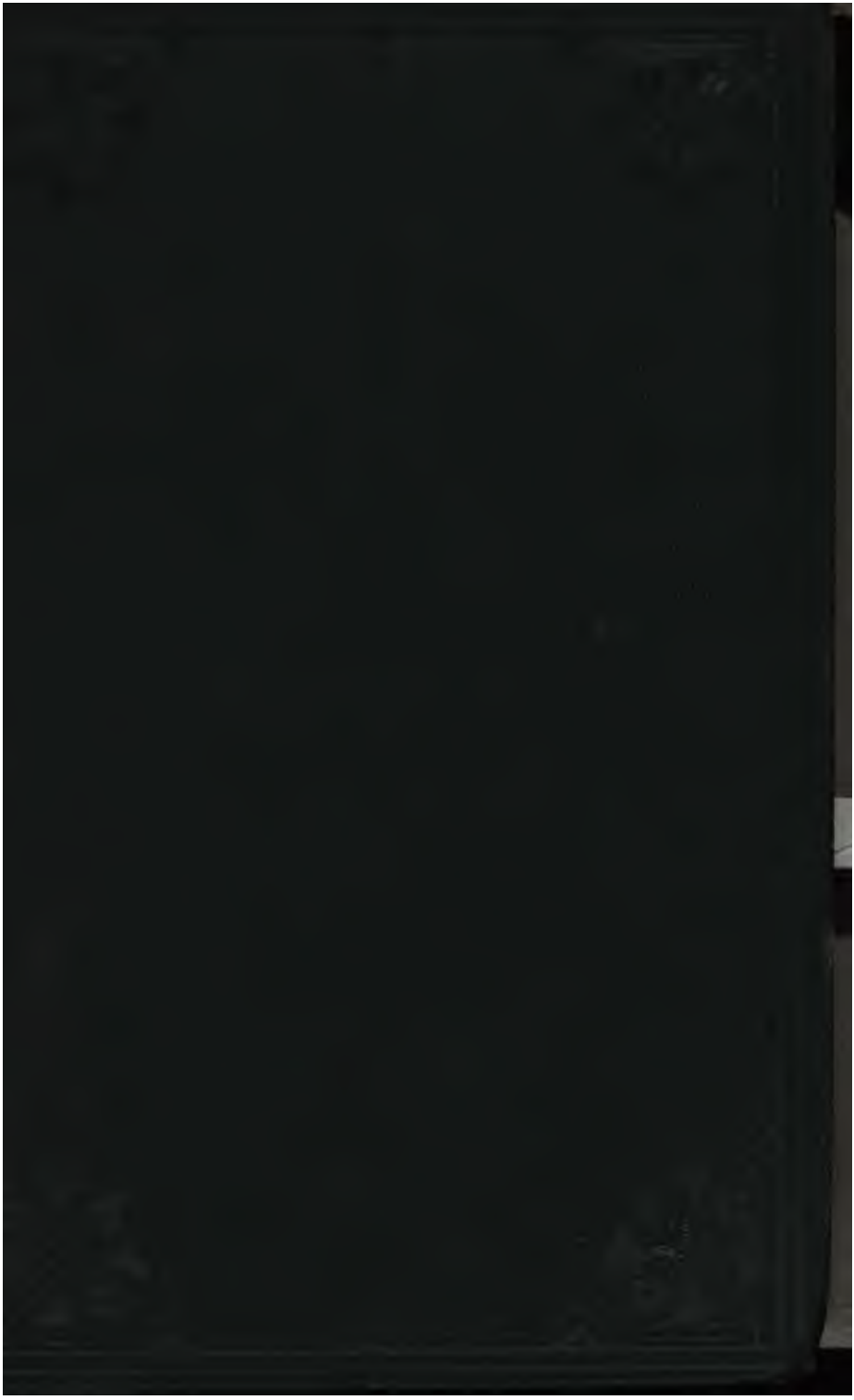

HAUNTED LIVES.

VOL. III.

HAUNTED LIVES.

A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"UNCLE SILAS," "A LOST NAME," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.

HAUNTED LIVES.

CHAPTER I.

A GUEST APPROACHES.

"How soon, Mr. Dacre, will your tiresome business end, and you become a little more your own master?" asked Mrs. Wardell.

"Is not that a cruel question," he replied, "seeing that its conclusion will be the signal for my departure?"

"Oh! It cannot be that," she said. "On the contrary, I fancy you would be the more likely to prolong your stay, having time to enjoy yourself, instead of being all day wearied over other people's business, and obliged to maintain your incognito. It must be so very tiresome."

"It is very tiresome. Nothing fatigues so much as disguise; as for me, the constraint under which I hourly find myself

"And you don't very much like that old man?" said Laura Gray.

"Why do you say so?" asked Dacre, amused. To which question Laura instantly made this answer—

"If I said, Mr. Dacre, that it seems to me you don't like anyone very much, would not that be a reason for what I say?"

"Yes, logically; but is the fact so? So far from liking too little, there are people whom I like too well," said Mr. Dacre.

"See there—self-condemned!" exclaimed Miss Gray. "When you say you like too well, you mean better than they deserve; so that even these favourites are thrown into the general pit of depreciation."

"How ingenious you are, Miss Gray, and how cruel in exposing my weaknesses. Perhaps there was that little flaw—perhaps I do think too well of myself and too meanly of others, except in one case, which is my insanity."

"But to return to my old clergyman, whom you called a bore just now, you certainly don't like him," said Miss Gray.

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would be very good fun in such a situation, and I hope I need not assure you that I really do not bear him a particle of ill will."

"Well, that is fortunate," said Miss Gray.

"How comes it to deserve that character?" he replied.

"I say it is fortunate," she answered, "because I expect Mr. Parker here every minute."

"O really! Well I'm sure he'll not be annoyed. I can only say for myself I shall be most happy to meet him. I dare say he'll have forgotten me totally; but I'll undertake to amuse you by the process of recalling myself to his recollection. I'll remind him of things that will surprise him. At what hour was he to come?"

"At a quarter past nine; and it will be that, wont it, in a few minutes?" answered Laura Gray.

"In two minutes," he said, looking at his watch. "I hope he'll turn out to be the man I recollect; but, indeed, as he's De

Beaumirail's friend there can't be a doubt of that."

"He wrote a long letter to Laura; he says De Beaumirail is dying," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Dying, is he? I heard he was rather seedy; but dying—I had no idea of that," said Dacre.

"Oh, yes! so he says," continued Mrs. Wardell, "and he proposed looking in some day to have a talk with Laura."

"Yes," interposed Laura; "so, respecting the good old man, and liking him, although he does bore me, as you say, on one point, I asked him to come and dine with us to-day; but he could not, he said, having already promised to dine near this with a relation, so I told him to come to tea to us if he could, and he said we might expect him at a quarter past nine."

"He'll walk here, I suppose?" said Dacre, looking out of the window. "It is quite charming. It will be such a surprise; and I venture to say you will see comedy and even farce when he comes."

Dacre seemed immensely amused by his thoughts and anticipations, and as he looked out into the darkness visible of a moonless night, the pane of glass reflected the lines of his strange smile.

Miss Gray was also looking from the window down that short broad avenue, at one side of which the lamps of Dacre's carriage shot their red rays under the branches.

"It is not easy to see out there to-night, Miss Gray. If the glass reflects the light in the room, you can see nothing," said Alfred Dacre.

"Yes, thanks. I have shut out the light very well with my hand," said the young lady. "I think I see—yes—there is some one walking up a little beyond your carriage. Yes, there is the shutting of the gate."

"Yes, I do see something tall—either Parker or a ghost—gliding up toward the lamps. Capital — bravo — we shall soon have him here, and—but, by Jove, I quite forgot *that!* What's to be done? It's

awfully stupid of me. I should have remembered. It has just flashed on me, there is a way in which his seeing me may be highly injurious to the friend whom I have come to England to serve. I *must* say good night. Pray, don't for the world mention my name. I'll try to get away; but I am half afraid it is too late. Good night."

And Dacre, who had reached the door by this time, smiled and waved his adieux, and was gone.

"He'll meet him on the stairs, I think?" said Laura.

"Then he might as well have stayed a little longer, and helped us to entertain this old man you have brought here," said Julia Wardell. "For to tell you the truth, I don't know how we are to amuse him."

"Oh, my dear, it is his business to amuse us. He is coming up, and so, I daresay, is Mr. Dacre, for he must have met him."

CHAPTER II.

NEWS OF DACRE.

THE moment Dacre got outside the drawing-room door, and closed it behind him, the smile died from his face. He ran down the broad stairs, looking at the hall-door, so soon as he had turned the corner of the second flight. In the hall he threw on his hat and cloak, and there hesitated, for he heard a step at the door, followed by a knock and a ring.

The door from the hall to the back stairs was open. The second door was closed; and into this short lobby, about eight feet deep, Alfred Dacre stepped, for he heard the approach of the servant to let in the visitor, whom he had resolved not to accost.

He had on that broad-leafed felt hat (much more picturesque than the Jerries

which have superseded them), and his cloak folded about him, and would have done very well for a serenading Spaniard in a melodrame. He was not much afraid that the old man, who was now admitted, would recognise him. Whether the consequence of that might be small or great, he stood back two or three steps, and looked out straight toward the hall.

Mr. Parker, walking slowly by, cast his eyes into this retreat, and saw Dacre, who confronted him with a stern carelessness. The old clergyman hesitated, looked hard and doubtfully at him, and then saying—

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," he drew back, and walked upstairs.

Dacre laughed quietly to himself. Then again his mood changed, and he sighed deeply. At the foot of the stairs he paused with his hand on the banister, and he thought perhaps it would be as well to go up and have a talk with them all. But he shrugged and whispered, looking wistfully upward toward the drawing-room—"No, no—time enough. It is time I should

change my tactique. I have always acted hand over head, and my impetuosity has driven me on a *chevaux de frise* often enough. Is any other man so torn and scarred as I? Let us, then, wait and think it over."

Alfred Dacre was in the painful position of a man whose motive has failed him, and who finds, consequently, his hopes gliding into confusion, and his plans dissolving.

He walked out into the cool night air, and from under the boughs of the old trees he looked back on the drawing-room window. He leaned against the trunk of a tree—neither thinking, nor trying to think —simply undergoing as odd a vicissitude of feeling as ever agitated human breast.

"To one thing constant—never," he said. "I wish I were a great deal better, or a little worse. If that old fellow recognised me, he is a wonder. Who knows what mischief he may do? Heaven knows what they are talking about up there by this time. I am strangely tempted to return to the drawing-room, and see it out. That

simple old man—it would be comedy. I wonder what Miss Gray would think of it? Would she laugh? She is so odd."

He got into the carriage that was awaiting him.

"Yes," he said with a sigh, "to be unapproachably beautiful—to be so eccentric —so resolute—so grave—and to be all this, and clever also, *is* to be very odd indeed! I have seen a good deal of life. Have I not lived in fairyland, and seen the Sirens? In all my experience of young-lady life, I have never met with any creature exactly like her. No, pretty Laura—no, Laura Challys Gray. How pretty her name is! Laura Challys Gray!"

He liked repeating it. Softly he said it again and again as they drove away. He sitting with his back to the horses, and looking with his head from the window toward the point from which he was receding; and when they passed the gate, and the glow of the windows was hidden from his eyes, he threw himself back with another great sigh, and was again in chaos.

"'Mug in and mug out,' as our Lancashire groom used to say," thought Dacre.

"Shilly-shally" trumpets with uncertain sounds. Alfred Dacre detested the whole thing—oscillating characters, mixed motives, and divided duties, and closed his eyes impatiently on the present, not knowing in what mood an hour or two hence might find him.

It needs a shrewd man to know another. But did that man ever live who thoroughly knew a woman?

"If I allowed my fancy to run away with me, I might be in love with that girl before I could tell how it came to pass. As it is, that pretty phantom haunts me more than consists with my cold and scientific ideas. In some respects all the worse, in others all the better. The adventure interests me more pleasantly as I proceed."

And this volatile person looked out gaily from the carriage window, and seemed already to have taken quite another view of his case.

About an hour after he had taken his

departure, old Mr. Parker bid good-night to the ladies, and departed also.

They had hardly enjoyed a five minutes' talk, preliminary to going to their rooms, when the old clergyman returned—suddenly appearing at the drawing-room door. He looked very pale, and in a flurried way said—

"I beg pardon, Miss Gray; but some one is said to be in danger, I fear?"

"Who is it, sir—not me?" exclaimed Miss Gray, in whose apprehensions Dacre was present.

"A gentleman drank tea with you to-night?" asked Mr. Parker.

"Yes; he was going away exactly as you were coming up stairs. Do you mean him?"

"It can be no other."

Laura grew pale.

"Pray tell me what it is," she urged.

"As I went out at your gate, a tall gentleman, with a white waistcoat, smoking a cigar, walked up to me, and said, 'You are Mr. Parker?' and then added—'be so

kind as to go back and inform Miss Gray that the gentleman who drank tea there, and left, I suppose, some little time ago, will be waylaid, and perhaps murdered, on his way into town. He had better be followed, and warned quickly. She will know what to do.' And having said this, he began to smoke again, and walked away. I was sorry I did not stop him; but at the time I was so much surprised, and did not recollect myself for a little—and so I came back to tell you."

"But he has been gone an hour or more," said Miss Gray, distractedly ringing the bell.

"Can I be of any use, Miss Gray?" said the old gentleman.

"None, thanks — unless, perhaps, you would call at the police office, wherever it is, and tell them there."

"I'll inquire—I'll make it out," said Mr. Parker, and with a hurried good-night, which Laura Gray scarcely heard, he took his departure.

She despatched two servants instantly;

and after a considerable interval, they returned with no tidings. They had spoken with all the policemen they met upon the line of their route. But nothing had occurred, so far as they knew, to justify the warning. A visit to Miniver's hotel resulted only in informing them that Mr. Dacre had not been there that day.

There was nothing farther to be done; and Laura Gray was very anxious.

CHAPTER III.

TWO LETTERS.

NEXT morning brought no tidings of Dacre.

"Of course we should have heard if anything had gone wrong," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Oh, yes—certainly. Don't you really think so?" answered Laura.

"*Certainly*," said Mrs. Wardell. "I think it was simply a hoax."

"I wish I could be sure of that," said she; "but I'm afraid it is all about that odious persecution that he *will* try to prevent. He is quite overmatched by their unscrupulous wickedness and craft, and I'm afraid it must end badly."

"Well, dear, you know I don't understand that affair at all, and I've given up trying to understand it; but if they are fools enough to write anonymous letters, I really

think we are still greater fools to give ourselves trouble and run risks in trying to stop them."

"But there is more than that, dear Julia. I always act from impressions. I don't pretend to reason, but these people have acted in the most extraordinary way, and have gone to expense, and have been in this house, and minutely informed about all our sayings and doings, and they did make an attempt upon Mr. Dacre's life near Islington; and they have written with such malignity and even fury, I am sometimes half sorry I did not act on my own judgment entirely on ascertaining the identity of that frightful little Jew, but Mr. Dacre would have it otherwise, and Heaven only knows how it will all end."

"Nonsense, my dear, there's no one on earth would give twopence to hurt a hair of my old head, and I'm very sure they would be still less disposed to hurt you. I don't say I understand it, mind, for I confess I do not; but now that the Jew you mention as the ringleader of the whole thing has

been found out, and probably knows that he is so, they are welcome to fire at Mr. Dacre or any other person if they dare."

"Whether we invite them, or not, they will make themselves welcome whenever it suits their purpose, unless the police be directed upon them; and why Mr. Dacre is so much against it I can't imagine. It seems to me so much more dangerous obviously to delay action, than it could possibly be to pursue and crush those wicked people. I suppose he will explain his reasons some time or other, but at present I confess his conduct seems to me perfectly inexplicable, and so absurdly rash; but I certainly will not allow it to go on any longer. I have had too much agitation and alarm, and if, with the evidence we can give, the law and police are not strong enough to reach them, this is plainly no country for honest people to live in."

Laura Gray was in miserable spirits. Julia Wardell could see how nervous and wretched she was, though she did not talk,

perhaps, as much as other girls under the same pressure would have done.

Noon came and passed, and no message had yet come to relieve the suspense of friends at Guildford House. Miss Gray was growing more and more miserable as the day wore on. One o'clock came; two o'clock, and still no tidings. Luncheon was for Miss Gray a mere make-belief, though Mrs. Wardell did not fail to show her a good example. The elder lady proposed a drive, but Laura excused herself.

The servant returned for a second time that day from Miniver's hotel with the same barren answer to inquiries respecting Mr. Dacre. No one had called there to inquire for his letters since yesterday morning, and no news of him had reached them. This seemed to Miss Gray a dismaying circumstance.

At three o'clock the postman brought two letters, or more properly notes—one from the Silver Dragon, written rather tremulously by Charles Mannering.

He did not seem to be doing so well, and

complained that his doctor had placed him under stricter rule, and that he was practising a fraud upon him in writing this little note of his health. It was certainly on the whole an unsatisfactory bulletin.

The other note was from Alfred Dacre, and was as follows:—

"My dear Miss Gray,—I write lest any accident should prevent my paying my respects in person this evening, to tell you that there occurred a kind of crisis of a very bold and unexpected kind in the machinations of our tormentors, that by favour of an accident—a rather hairbreadth one—the affair totally broke down, and that I hope to lay at your feet the fruits of our victory. My old friend Mr. Parker I observed looked very hard at me last night, with the eye of a man who fancied he had seen me before, but he failed to recognise me, which I was rather glad of, as his talking, ever so little, in a certain quarter, might, in a roundabout way, injure some people in whom I am a great deal interested. I shall say more

when I have the honour of seeing you. Believe me, my dear Miss Gray, ever yours sincerely, "ALFRED DACRE."

That was all, but so far as it went it tallied unpleasantly with the message of that smoking man last night in the white waistcoat, who had confided his alarm to Mr. Parker.

In Challys Gray's mind there lurked a dreadful suspicion that the attempt of which the person at the gate had apprized the old clergyman, had in part succeeded. Was Alfred Dacre hurt in his Quixotic enterprise on her behalf?

The cynic viewing Miss Challys Gray's conventual project in the light of cold experience and hard results, might in that case enjoy his bleak smile over the ruins of—not a castle—but a convent, in the air.

Peace had she sought. Well, here were her *only* two visitors, she might say—each laid in blood-stained bandages, on a bed of pain, if not of danger, and each in conse-

quence of being associated by these visiting relations with her. So much for monastic peace. What of her conventual platonics? Had not a stranger stolen into her heart? Was there not a phantom in her pretty head—a fancy hardly suspected till now, and now almost detected as—a passion? Alas for that gray ivy-mantled monastery. The mirage is mist, and she in the desert. Nothing of all her dream remains but—solitude.

She is restless, she is silent—from the window she goes to the piano—but the music sounds wild, and pains her heart with the thrill of a reproach. To the flowers she goes, turning them over in the vase with her pretty finger tips. But the blossoms and the odour were melancholy.

"Julia," she said.

Julia Wardell was working at her crochet-needles as usual, and the invalid dog had been removed from her bedroom to a cushion on the sofa, by her side, for change of air.

"Well, dear?" replied the old lady, pushing up her spectacles.

"Do you take any interest in Mr. Dacre?" resumed Laura.

"How, my dear—what do you mean?" inquired good Mrs. Wardell.

"Do you care whether he is dead or alive?" asked Laura, with suppressed impetuosity.

"Dead or alive!—what can you mean by asking such a question?—why of course I do."

"Well, then, hadn't you better send to inquire?" demanded Miss Gray.

"Where! darling?"

"To Miniver's hotel—*I*'m not going to send again. Indeed, I think you might have thought of it this morning," answered Miss Gray.

"Well, so I should, I dare say, only *you* thought of it first—but shall I send?" replied the old lady.

"If you wish," persisted Challys. "*I*'m not going to send every time, and the house is full of useless men, with nothing to do."

"Well, I think, yes, it would be kind; but I have no doubt he is quite well."

"If you don't like," said Challys, with a brighter colour and a flash in her eyes, "you need not do it. It is only to ring the bell, and tell them to go."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Wardell, glancing through the window to the sky, and getting up, "and a walk will do them nothing but good."

So she marched over to the bell, and touched it, as Miss Gray sat down at the piano, and once more struck its chords, and played away so spiritedly, that when the man entered, in reply to the bell, Mrs. Wardell had to signal to him to approach more nearly, to enable her, without inconvenience, to give him her commission.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED.

This messenger returned, however, like the other, without tidings. Mr. Dacre had not yet, that day, sent for his letters. No one had called from him, and they could tell nothing whatever about him.

So then, patience, the great palliative, and "time the consoler," were all that remained to the friends of Mr. Dacre at Guildford House.

I cannot tell how Laura Gray felt—she was silent. Lamps by this time were lighted in the drawing-room. There was a book open before her; but the window was also open, and her eyes were often raised to it, and she silently listening. I think she had opened the volume at page 159, and

after half an hour's quiet reading the book was still open at page 159.

"You'll be glad to hear he's better, my dear," said Julia Wardell, entering the room suddenly.

"How do you know?" inquired Laura, turning quickly.

"By his eating some chicken, my dear. I only hope he hasn't eaten too much," answered Mrs. Wardell.

"Oh, that's very nice," said Laura Gray, blushing intensely, and glad that she was not suspected.

"Yes; I always know when the darling little soul is really feeling better, by his eating chicken," said Julia, seating herself again at her work. "I think it was wise my sending him to his little bed in my room. It would have been very bad—he takes his medicine at nine—disturbing him so late as half-past ten, till he's quite well, of course: and now he's only come here—wasn't he?—to his own little sofa, in his drawing-room, for half an hour."

"Hush!—the gate!—listen!" said Laura

Gray, looking toward the window, breathless, with her lips parted.

"Yes, it is the gate, and now—yes, here it is," and a carriage, with lamps burning, drove up to the hall-door.

Laura drew a long breath, and began to read her book, and turn over the leaves diligently, and now there were steps on the stairs, and she felt herself growing pale. The door opened, and the servant announced "Mr. Dacre."

In the momentary interval her heart seemed to cease beating, and as the name was pronounced it fluttered up with a sudden bound, as if it would suffocate her. She felt quite wild with the sense of relief.

What did Alfred Dacre see? He saw Miss Gray pale and cold, looking down on her book as if too much interested to look up.

"Laura, dear,—Mr. Dacre," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Oh, Mr. Dacre?" and Laura looked up smiling, and gave him a very cold hand.

"I was half afraid I shouldn't have been

able to come to-night; and I'm so happy; but I hope you are quite well."

She was looking very pale—paler than he had thought when he first came in, and there was a little brilliant hectic in each cheek.

"Quite well, thanks. I've been looking into this book, and it is so dull, and it is very good of you coming. I don't know how we should have got through this evening."

"And we have been in such a fright about you," interposed Mrs. Wardell.

"Really," said he, and glanced at Laura's face, to which came the prettiest blush in the world.

"Well, I don't know hardly that," she said, trying to assent herself; "we heard some foolish story, and it would have been too provoking, you know, if your so good-naturedly looking in upon us should have exposed you to any annoyance from those ill-disposed people who, I am afraid, are watching you. What was it, Julia? Tell Mr. Dacre exactly what we heard."

Mrs. Wardell with eager volubility recounted the odd little alarm of last evening, told the story of their exertions in his behalf, and described the young man who gave the warning, and then declared their thanks and obligations.

For the first time a frown darkened Dacre's face; he seemed to wince at some recollection, and impatiently and even harshly said—

"I disdain thanks. I do what I like for my own sake. I like every one to treat me as an enemy. I mean as to my motives, to assume that I am selfish."

He paused suddenly, as if startled at his own words.

"You are very peremptory with me, Mr. Dacre," replied Julia Wardell, with a surprised look; "but you know it would be very unusual not to thank people who are really kind to us."

"Oh, yes. I did not mean to address what I said to—to, in fact, to any one in particular. I meant merely to express my belief about people's motives, and to say I'm

no better than others, and no worse either," he added, almost fiercely.

He saw Miss Gray's fine eyes looking upon him with a gaze of surprise, almost of alarm. His own eyes dropped to the floor, and after a moment or two he raised them again with an odd smile.

"I'm sure there is something oriental in my blood," he said. "I'm so prone to exaggeration, my friends will mitigate my hyperboles, and even understand the feelings that impel me into them."

"Well, if you wont allow us to thank you," said Mrs. Wardell, a little huffed, "or at least receive our thanks so oddly——"

"Pray excuse me; it is not ingratitude," he said; "but I'm not very happy, and my vehemence is rather the expression of pain than of thought; thinking is an exercise that never was my *forte*."

"Why thinking? You *must* think, Mr. Dacre; is not that the attribute of the human race?" said Julia Wardell, who did not know what to make of him.

"One grows sometimes impatient and

disgusted with one's own folly, and incensed at one's malignant luck, and what a man says who is stung with anger and delirious with his wounds is all chance, and of course counts for nothing. I am sure I owe an apology; but how is one to make it if one does not remember what one has said? All I can say, Mrs. Wardell, is, that if I talked nonsense I know you'll forgive me, and if worse I beg your pardon a thousand times."

"Well, what you said was—what was it? It has really gone out of my head, but it does not in the least matter; and this I am quite sure of, that you said nothing that needed an apology."

"That's very kind of you, Mrs. Wardell."

"And I'm so glad you are come," she continued. "You can't have a notion how dull we are, and how we miss your music when you don't come; and you'll be glad to hear, for you like dogs, that my poor little creature is ever so much better to-day."

Dacre, I'm afraid, did not hear all this. As the old lady was speaking he came to Laura's side, and while Mrs. Wardell entered

into conversation with her dog, he stooped over the young lady. At a little distance you would have fancied he was looking into the book that lay open before her, and he said very low—

"I hope I did not speak ungraciously, Miss Gray; there is nothing so sweet as being thanked by you; but you are not to thank me. When, if ever, I do a service worthy of such a reward, and the only one I can ever do will tear my heart asunder, then I may claim it, but not now."

"As usual, Mr. Dacre, you speak enigmas," said Laura; "but notwithstanding all you say I *am* obliged to you for coming to-night. We had heard what made us very uncomfortable, and I am sure you have something to tell me."

"Why do you think so?" he asked, as if he shrank from it.

"Don't you think one might guess from the things you have said that you have something unusual to tell?" said she.

"Yes, I dare say. I'm sure I have been talking like a fool." He laughed more in

his old way. "I was going to say a very vain thing—I was going to say I had been talking very unlike myself; but, Miss Gray, I don't regret anything. If all this meanness and villany had not been practised, I should not now have been here. I don't regret the price that buys that privilege fo me; and cost what more it may, I'll retain it as long as I can endure the melancholy agony of that happiness."

A look of surprised uncertainty in Miss Gray's large eyes suddenly met his own.

"I see I've been talking more enigmas; half our riddles have really no answers to them. I should be very much puzzled I know to explain my own dark sayings. It is much easier to speak in an unknown tongue than to interpret." And as he concluded this little speech his old manner returned; he laughed, and Miss Gray felt reassured.

"Well, you are to tell me," she said, "whether anything has happened."

"A great deal," he said.

"Wont you tell me what it is?"

"People have repented."

"Incorrigibly oracular this evening," said Miss Laura Gray.

"Bitterly—bitterly—life-long repentance. Before I tell you anything I must exact a distinct promise," he said.

They were still talking in an under-tone, and Julia Wardell, conversing affectionately still with her lap-dog, was not in their way.

"Say what it is," asked Miss Gray.

"It is that you wont *thank* me."

"Not thank you? Then I am sure you have done me some great kindness," said Miss Gray.

"Something has happened, but there is —*nothing*—not the least kindness—so pray allow me to insist on my condition," persisted Alfred Dacre.

"It is delightful to thank people, and very hard to be denied, and very difficult, too, to keep such a promise."

"You don't know, Miss Gray, how much you torture me. I thought my request an humble one enough, and yet you wont grant it."

"I'm so curious that I *must* grant it; and, if I appear very rude and unkind, remember who compelled me to be so."

"Only promise that you'll never thank me."

"Never! Why, you're becoming more and more exacting!" exclaimed Miss Laura Gray.

"*Never* thank me," he repeated.

"Well, you know I'm in a corner, and I can't escape, and I'm too curious to wait; so I believe there is nothing for it but to promise," said Miss Gray.

"Well, Miss Gray, you are not to say thank you," repeated Dacre.

"Then, as it must be so, I wont say thank you; and now you are to tell me what it is."

"I had some doubts," he answered, "as to whether I should bring it myself; in fact," he continued, with a momentary look of pain and dejection, "it was a struggle; it is a vile swindle, but I can't help it, and here it is—and I'll never touch it more."

With these words he placed in her hand

a large sealed envelope addressed to her in his own hand. A melancholy look he fixed on her for a moment; she gazed upward in his eyes, expecting him to speak, and I think he was on the point of doing so, but changed his mind, and went instead to the piano and sat down, and there played snatches of old, wild, and melancholy airs; so Miss Gray broke the seal of the envelope and examined its contents.

CHAPTER V.

LAURA READS.

THE letter instantly rivetted her attention, for the hand was the same bold and peculiar one which had written the villanous letters which had so perplexed and affrighted her. She gasped a sudden exclamation of amazement, and began to read.

"Can you sing us that charming little song again to-night, Mr. Dacre?" asked Mrs. Wardell, whom the tones of the piano recalled from a reverie. "'Come to me,' you know, 'when daylight sets;' is not that it?"

"I'm afraid,—thank you very much for wishing it,—but I'm afraid I've got a little cold, and I would not for the world be a failure, having had so very kind a reception," said he, not caring just then to sing.

"A cold! dear me, I'm so sorry. Let me advise you to try one of these lozenges. I find them very good when *my* voice is affected."

Very gratefully he declined, and she continued—

"Indeed, I think there is some kind of influenza attacking every one just now. I've had it slightly, like you; and here is my poor little miserable creature here suffering from his chest, so oppressed at times you could hear him breathing where you're sitting now. I'm not half satisfied with the advice I've got—no, indeed, we are not, my poor little darling soul—and I was going to ask you, Mr. Dacre, if you understand anything of the treatment of dogs; I should be so much obliged if you'd allow me to consult you."

"I should be only too happy, if you really wish it; but I ought to tell you that I have not very much experience, and have not been fortunate. In fact, I never treated more than one dog, and he died, and it was

thought, poor fellow, I accidentally poisoned him."

"Oh, indeed! Oh, I see; but you must have been awfully pained."

"Yes, so we were, the dog and I; but he, poor fellow, got out of his pain first: and I'm only too happy to obey you, and at least I can promise that if I should be so unhappy as to poison another dog, it shan't be with the same thing."

"Well, thanks, there's time enough; we can see how he is to-morrow," said good Mrs. Wardell, a little frightened.

All this time, as he played lightly or talked, he was looking over the piano, and watching Miss Gray, who was reading this paper. It said—

"I write to acknowledge the offence we have committed, and that still worse which we meditated. I have placed in Mr. Alfred Dacre's hands a sigred confession, on the condition that no one sees it, unless we violate our undertaking, hereby entered into, that we shall give you no more trouble. It is understood, on the other hand, that

you give us none, unless we break this engagement.

"The locket set with brilliants which we sent at first you will please to purchase at 70*l.*, which sum we have agreed you may distribute among such public charities as you select; and the acknowledgment of the same, by advertisement in the *Times*, we accept as payment of said sum. This being accepted as a settlement of all complaints, claims, or possible litigations on account of past occurrences, we withdraw, and unless recalled by a departure from those stipulations, we shall appear no more."

"Oh, what a relief! That gallant friend. What do I not owe him?"

Her eyes spoke all this as she raised them in silent delight from the paper, and fixed them for a moment on that handsome musician, who lowered his at the same moment to the notes, and seemed absorbed in the tangled maze of a half-forgotten air.

He saw that her eyes stole again toward him, and he said—

"I think, Mrs. Wardell, I *could* sing a little, if you still command me. I fancy my voice is better. May I try, Miss Gray?"

"Certainly. We are always so much obliged," she answered with alacrity.

Mrs. Wardell seconded the proposal, and Alfred Dacre sang more exquisitely than ever.

Thanked and approved by his good-natured little audience, Alfred Dacre got up and crossed the room to Laura Gray's side.

She knew that his song had been sung for a purpose. She felt that he was quite in earnest when he told her not to thank him; and this song he had interposed like a dream, that the grateful impulse might have time to cool, and she to remember and observe her promise.

She held up the envelope in her fingers, with the light of triumph and gratitude in her eyes.

"You are to keep that," he said, "and name it no more. If there's anything in it you don't understand you have only to

ask me. Otherwise pray never mention it to me."

"I'm so delighted!" she looked in his face, smiling.

He smiled—but it was with an effort—and the wintry light quickly faded away, and left behind a look of pain and annoyance.

"I'm very glad—that is, that *you* are pleased," said Dacre.

"And aren't you?"

"I say I'm glad that you are glad," said he, a little impatiently.

"But aren't you pleased to see this?" She held up the envelope again.

"No," said he.

"No? I'm sure you *do* like to look at it."

Miss Laura Gray teased him, but I am sure it was her curiosity that prompted.

"Miss Gray, pray believe me. I look at it with a disgust and horror which you can't conceive. Of which it would give you but a faint idea to suppose yourself compelled to look in the face of a corpse, or anything else which most repulses you.

Pray, lock it up, and try to put it out of your mind—for you'll never have trouble from that quarter more."

Laura looked at him, and saw that he was profoundly pained. So after a little silence, she mentioned another subject, though not a very remote one.

"I dare say you have seen Mr. De Beaumirail since?"

"That is a subject, Miss Gray, that I thought *you* objected to," said Alfred Dacre.

"I don't like speaking of him—that is very true—but I have a vague idea that he knew something of this."

And she glanced at the envelope still in her fingers.

"You are perfectly right," said he; "I'm sure of it."

"And how was it?" she asked.

"I can't tell. You'll kindly not ask me to discuss it—but I hate and despise him more than ever."

"I have no reason to like him," she said.

"Few people, I fancy, had," said Dacre, "though, as I have often said, I am the

person he injured most; perhaps the only one whom he injured seriously."

"Do you know his history?"

"Yes; very well."

"You know he treated my family very ill," she said.

"I think I know what you allude to, Miss Gray," he said, in a tone of melancholy respect. "But I believe upon that one point you are entirely mistaken. Ardenbroke and I have talked that painful matter over more than once."

"Ah!" said she bitterly, "the fickle, odious, cruel coward, can the other world send up a viler soul than the man who trifles with that sacred feeling, and kills a poor creature by that slow torture?"

Alfred Dacre, with downcast eyes, was listening respectfully.

Miss Gray went on with sudden excitement—

"I've often wished that I were a man, that I might have let him go free, and fought him—to strike down that cold villain with a pistol shot, or die by his—and let

him lay death upon death, and go to judgment with a double murder. Ardenbroke and you—and you and Ardenbroke—with your metaphysics, and your partisanship, and your cruelty! To break a girl's heart is but the breaking of a china tea-cup. What's a woman? The plaything of your insolence. What her love? A song to laugh over. The feather of your vanity. But *I* say, the noblest treasure that ever God poured out on earth! Oh, manhood! Oh for the time when men were men, and honoured the creatures whom nature committed to their protection. But, oh, that's all old-fashioned now—entirely mistaken—and men are wiser; and women must be patient—yes, patient—till God's justice comes to rule the world."

Alfred Dacre was taken aback, as the phrase is, by the sudden vehemence of Challys Gray. Still looking down, he waited—

"Entirely mistaken, say you and Ardenbroke? You put your heads together, and wonder why such a fuss about a girl's fan-

cies, and pity De Beaumirail; and then, with a shrug or two, turn over to some other folly. But I tell you, show me the man who in such a matter practises the least duplicity, or even thinks deceit, and I see a villain."

Was there anything in these generalities that Dacre applied for himself? There was a vengeful light for the moment in Challys Gray's eyes; and his, with a dilated gaze, met hers—he looked white as a ghost—stern and resigned, and after a brief gaze, he lowered his eyes to the ground.

"I don't understand people's motives, or much, I'm afraid, about right and wrong," said he at last. "I don't understand human nature, because I can't, to begin with, understand myself. But, dear Miss Gray, don't we walk in such a mist? I mean with ideas frequently so clouded, when we are ourselves concerned—in a region so haunted by illusions, and with a vision so feeble, that even when we most wish to be fair, we follow shadows and lose our way?"

Miss Gray was silent, looking sadly out on the darkness.

"And although I have quite misconveyed my real feelings about that particular circumstance, and although I was unfortunate enough to incur a portion of your censure, I yet am glad that I was present—very glad, for many reasons. Your feelings I can understand, and respect and admire them, more than I can describe, and I shan't make the least attempt at present to talk in extenuation of myself and Ardenbroke; but we have been misapprehended, and any time you command me to explain, I shall only be too grateful."

A little pause followed, and he came beside Miss Gray, and very low he said—

"Yes; I am very glad, although some of what you said pained me acutely—very glad that I was here, because I feel, Miss Gray, that I know you better, and that, in spite of all, you trust me more."

And so there came another little silence.

CHAPTER VI.

A STORY.

HAPPY Julia Wardell! Happy in your invincible placidity. What nerves! How charmingly organized for the uses of a chaperon. Not quite "hard of hearing," but slightly muffled and indistinct, and so luxuriously prone to slumber! And happy Challys Gray in a companion so habitually floating away into dreamland, and so cheerfully ready at call to return. Lord Ardenbroke used to laugh at a chaperon so admirably chosen. Challis Gray and Mr. Dacre had both forgotten her existence for some minutes, and, in fact, her existence was not just then for them. In tranquil visions she at that moment nodded, making superb double chins, among the clouds; her

worsteds on her lap, and one crochet-needle on the floor.

Alfred Dacre perceived the state of things, and was secretly happy. Challis Gray, too, knew it somehow, and did not care to disturb it. Then Alfred Dacre said, more like himself—

"In an old garden, that I loved when I was a boy—the picturesque may have had something to do with it—but it had the best gooseberries I ever eat; there were two time-honoured sun-dials, with fluted urn-shaped stems, stained gray and green with mosses. They had inscriptions: one said 'we must'—the thing itself supplying the hiatus, *die-all*, thus telling of the sleep that brings an end of pain; and his brother answered *tempus fugit*—time flies—telling us to make all we can of the hour that is upon the wing. These solemn old dials preached. They could do little else, for the ancient standard fruit-trees had grown into a forest, and the sun seldom touched them; and so, as my mood varies, as hope comes or despair, I find myself again in the twinkling

shadow, and read the old lesson 'we must,' or else *tempus fugit*, and life's again a comedy."

One or more of those precious minutes sped away in silence.

"One thing puzzles me," said Miss Gray, looking up from a little reverie, "and that is, what the pleasure of concealing one's antecedents, as the Americans say, one's surroundings, history, and individuality, can possibly be."

Dacre laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because I'm pleased. I think you are doing me a great honour. I venture to think that when you say all that, you are so good as to mean me."

"I do mean you. But I don't think it was fair to make me say so in direct terms; discussion is embarrassed by it."

"But this must not," said Dacre, with one of his gay laughs.

"I was not going to say anything very severe, however," said she.

"I ought to be very grateful, for I must

allow on this point no man is more open to attack," said Dacre.

"I was only going to say, in a general way, I wonder why people are so secret. We ought to be very well acquainted by this time, and yet you are a total stranger to me."

"How do you know? I may have been watching over you ever since you were a child, in quite another shape," said he.

She looked at him, and he at her, and after his wont he laughed.

"If people choose to be secret, let them be secret, there is always a reason—but it is not always a wrong one. Suppose their mystery the talisman, not only of their happiness, but of their safety."

"But why should innocent people require to pass themselves off for other persons?"

"Innocent people are liable to be injured by people who are not innocent; and it is sometimes very desirable to mystify them; but that is not my case. I have been acting strictly in the interest of others."

"But then that kind of mystery defeats itself," said she.

Dacre looked sharply at her.

"How?" said he.

"Why, it makes people so curious."

"And our first mother fell by her curiosity," said Dacre, with a faint smile and a shrug.

"Well, yes, so she did, but it was acted on by the serpent, and ended by her prying and—

"*Perishing*," said Dacre.

"Very well—yes—that shows how dangerous it is to trifle with."

"And why do I trifle with it—isn't that the question?"

"Yes, because once it is thoroughly aroused, it is sure to carry all before it," answered Miss Gray.

"Not always, and when it does—better it hadn't, often," said he, with a laugh. "I'll tell you a story. I wish I could think where I read it." He began again, "May I try to tell it?"

"Pray do."

"Once on a time a young Irish earl—I forget his title, but we'll look in Debrett—lived very solitary in a great old castle among the cliffs by the seaside. One night as he sat reading all alone a little white rat appeared on his table, and looked up in his face very winningly. He rather took a fancy to it—it looked so gentle—and next night just in the same way it appeared again. Lonely creatures easily become friends, and the earl and the little white rat grew fonder and fonder each of the other, and he tied a little ribbon of blue, the colour of true love, about its neck, and it slept on his pillow, and never left him day or night. Do I tire you?"

"No, pray go on."

"This faithful little rat was always with him, till some friends came to pay him a visit at his castle. To them this mutual attachment was capital fun; and the Irish earl, who was a sensitive man, felt their ridicule acutely, and fiercely frightened away the little white rat as often as it appeared, which was a sad thing for both, for

the earl sometimes reproached himself nearly as much as the little white rat seemed to suffer. But for the present it ended as I am about to tell you. I am afraid it is very long——"

"I assure you I like it extremely. Pray go on," said Miss Gray.

"He and these visitors had to depart together for England, and as the earl crossed the plank into the ship the little white rat ran before his feet. His friends laughed, of course, and the thin-skinned earl, in a frenzy of cowardice, kicked it into the sea, in which with a splash and a squeak it disappeared. So ends Fytte the first. May I go on?"

"Pray do," said she. "Though your sensitive earl, now bereft of the odd society which suited him best, is not an interesting person, I should still like to know how he fared."

"He returned to his castle, melancholy and solitary, and missed the little white rat, but it did not come. Months passed away, and at last came the long nights, winds, and

wintry weather. One night it was blowing hard and very dark as he sat late in his library, when on a sudden he heard a gun at sea, and another, and another. It was plain there was a ship in distress. With all his faults this earl had courage and goodnature, and with a few stout rowers he was soon pulling seaward, guided now and then by the glare of the gun over sky and sea, in the most heroic danger. He could now see dimly the outline of a great old-fashioned ship labouring in the sea, lighted up now and then in the blaze of its own cannon. Before they could reach it, however, the ship went down. But something was left floating where she sank, which with an effort they got into the boat, and found a lady in a white dress, and, as it seemed, lifeless. Not till they reached the castle she recovered slowly. She spoke a foreign language which nobody knew, but picked up English very soon, and the end of it was that he fell in love, and could think only of her. He asked her often about the ship she came in—her family, her home, and country, and also why she always wore

a broad velvet band about her throat. But upon all this she was silent, and grew so melancholy whenever he asked that at length he ceased to inquire, and ventured but one question more; he asked her—to marry him. The lady consented, but exacted a promise in return. He was never more to inquire into those mysteries on which she had implored his forbearance. So the promise was given, they were married, and they lived in perfect love, and the glory of their enchanted beatitude was darkened only by this one reserve. I think I've put Mrs. Wardell to sleep—have I?"

"Never mind—she nods and wakens like Homer—she will be all the brighter for this momentary eclipse. Pray go on," said Miss Gray.

"Well, it is nearly ended—all was serenity and sunshine. But still the earl had his own trouble—the unsatisfied curiosity on which his lips were sealed. When one morning early, standing by his wife's bed-side, as she lay asleep, with her throat uncovered, his

eye rested on the broad band of black velvet. The temptation was irresistible, for her scissors hung on her chatelaine at the bed's side, so he clipped the black velvet across, and he saw around her throat beneath it a blue ribbon, as with a wild cry his wife started up in the bed. At the same moment something jumped on the floor, and, looking down, he saw the little white rat with the blue ribbon round its neck run across the room, and again looking back he saw the bed untreasured of its mistress, and neither she nor the little white rat was ever again beheld in that lonely lord's castle. So ends the story. It is Bluebeard's moral, you see, a little more tenderly conveyed."

"I'm too much obliged to you, Mr. Dacre, to quarrel with your moral at present."

"No, Miss Gray, as I said before, you are not obliged to me. I think you made me a promise?"

"Yes, so I did. Well, I'm not a bit obliged to you—if so it must be—but recollect I've not promised to aid in mystifying myself."

"How do you mean, Miss Gray?"

"I mean," she laughed, "that if I can, I'll find it all out."

"No; I'm sure you'll not try."

"And, pray, why should I not?"

"Because you said you wished to thank me."

"So I do," said she.

"Well, Miss Gray, let your silence thank me. Spare me all inquiry. In a very little time, I may tell you everything. I know you are jesting, but I am grave enough, and mean what I say. In the meantime, think no more of it. Sufficient unto the day, you know—and the day will come."

"Not an evil day, I hope?" she said merrily.

"Good or evil," said he; "who can look into futurity? For me, it grows darker than ever—a darkness in which, as they say, I cannot see my own hand."

"But there are some things one can foresee?" pleaded Laura, gaily.

"One's breakfast; yes—but there's a haze

even over that; more over dinner; and so you find yourself in dense fog before you have well set out on your excursion into next week."

"Yes; of course there are all the uncertainties that depend upon sickness and death?" she said.

"And change?" he added sadly.

"Oh, yes; but change comes slowly," said she.

He shook his head.

"Suddenly sometimes," he said.

"Well, yes—material changes; houses may fall flat in a moment; ships blow up; old gentlemen drop down in apoplexys," began Laura.

"No, no; I mean quite honestly," said he.

"How do you mean?" asked Miss Gray.

"I mean it quite fairly, that minds change in a moment."

"Oh, you mean a whim? I don't think a whimsical person has a mind at all," said Miss Gray, and looked for a moment a little hard at him; and she added, "I think,

Mr. Dacre, somehow, there is always a suspicion of a conundrum in what you say?"

"And myself the subject of the riddle?" he laughed. "Well no, I was not, for a moment, thinking of myself, but quite another person's case, in which the mind, as you say, changed like a trick in a pantomime; all happened in a moment; a great affection, struck with the lightning of a single word, was killed. I saw it—it was quite irrevocable—and often recurs warningly to my recollection."

"Your recollections seem generally very happy, Mr. Dacre," said she; "a great deal happier, I fancy, than mine."

"If my memory is always in high spirits, it is the worst sign of my life. The more celestial the life, the sadder the memory. I can quite understand why *your* retrospect is toned with melancholy."

Laura Gray was looking out vaguely on a landscape painted with black on the darkest gray, with a few small stars glimmering intensely in the little piece of sky straight

above them. He thought, as he looked, that he saw a clear blush steal over her cheek, and a listening smile just traceable on her lip; but of her eyes he could see only the long silken fringes.

How pretty that stolen smile—that pleased blush—how beautiful he thought her!

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE MUSIC.

"Does she like me?" he thought, with a strange struggle at his heart, as he looked on that beautiful vision; "oh, does she like me—is it possible?"

Was it possible? What is impossible in the land of love—that world of illusions, recklessness, and miracles; and was he not conscious of his romantic beauty, and of that sad celestial tenor in which trembled the spirit of regret and passion; and had he not other fascinations also?

Mr. Dacre was one of those conceited persons who never in ordinary cases question their powers of conquest. He had but to obtain access to Guildford House, and where he chose to direct those subtle and

romantic influences, imagination must be dazzled, and hearts enslaved.

But this confidence belonged to the man who was himself indifferent. As an interest quite new to him began insensibly to steal into his heart, a scepticism, also new, began to affright him. The serpent who, we suppose, approaches to charm its prey with the peculiar spell of its eye, is encountered by a more potent charm, and becomes itself enthralled under the superior fascination of a basilisk.

Let us beg Mr. Dacre's pardon for so sinister a mythologic parallel. We who watch his operations are at liberty to form what conjecture we please. Of one thing only we are certain in the situation—if he has lost any part of his confidence or his liberty, he has succumbed not to design, but to a power, and he has been made acquainted with some of those sincerities which he had overlooked in his own character.

This man, hitherto so confident of success, was now elated, or trembled at every look of hers, and wondered at his own secret agi-

tations. He was angry with himself for abdicating his superiority, and often disdainfully vowed to reassert it. Dacre had grown out of some of the conceit of very early days. Still he had enough left to feel at times his pride wounded by his situation, and still more so by his entire uncertainty as to whether he had made the slightest impression even upon her fancy.

He took a chair close by her, and he said—

"How you like looking through that window into the dark. I have observed you do so, Miss Gray, so often—and yet you complain of mystery."

"As if everything was not a mystery," she said, still looking out with the same smile and a little sigh—"yes, everything."

"Everything beautiful, Miss Gray, I've felt it so; and there are mysteries which to me, I am sure, are better *still* mysterious—I mean, I should rather bear uncertainty than incur a danger of despair."

"Despair is a very grand word, Mr. Dacre, and belongs to tragedy, and epic poems, and theology."

"Yes; and is not one's own life and experience the vital fountain from which we draw the life of every epic? Theology; yes, every man, even the sceptic, has a theology of his own—and oh, Miss Gray, why smile at tragedy, *whose* life is all a comedy? Mine has long had nothing in it but—the sort of dolorous ingredient you laugh at."

"I think you are very ungrateful to talk so," said Miss Gray.

"Ungrateful! To whom?" asked Dacre.

"To Heaven," she answered. "It is so much a habit with people to talk in that discontented way, all in the wantonness of luxury and ingratitude. I dare say, Mr. Dacre, girl as I am, I have had more to grieve me than ever you have; but I believe it is only we who suffer from that kind of grief: your nobler sex is, people say, quite above that kind of folly—grieving, I mean, for other people."

"I wish, Miss Gray, you did not think quite so meanly of me," he said sadly, with something imploring in his great eyes.

"Not you; no, I ought not to have included you. It was very ungrateful of me—I don't indeed," she said quickly.

She was looking eagerly in his face, blushing very much. Her lips were parted, and he could just see the little glimmering edge of her tiny teeth, as for a moment she gazed on him with this beautiful glow of earnestness: and then she looked from the window again, and her eyes dropped, but the blush continued.

"Miss Gray," he said very low, "some time or other I shall be able, and you will permit me, to tell you something of my life—now, I *can't*. But you'll see then, you will, indeed, how full of grief and pride and folly it has been. You will see the bad, and you will see, also, the good. You'll think me wicked—but you'll see I can be noble; and you'll see how I have—adored you."

He was very pale, with the light of intense excitement in his eyes. He took her hand and held it in both his.

The colour fled from her cheeks, and she

returned his passionate gaze with a strange look, one that was very melancholy, but which also had fear in it. She looked on the point of bursting into tears.

A moment more, and still it was a pale, steadfast gaze that she fixed on him. He fancied he read in it an agony of doubt. This white stare of wonder and fear continued for some seconds, but her hand remained unresistingly locked in his.

"I did not dream of saying this when I came here. If it seems insane and audacious, at least it was not premeditated; it was just that I have grown to adore you, and—it was irrepressible."

Still not a word from Challys Gray, but her hand lay quite passively in his.

"Oh, Challys, darling, will you say nothing?"

Challys only pressed her other hand to her temple, and with a great sigh she whispered—

"It seems all a dream—what shall I say?—is he to go?"

She was looking with a melancholy gaze in his eyes as he spoke.

"Oh! no, I ought, I am sure I ought, and yet I can't—no, no, no, I can't say that!" she said.

"God for ever bless you, darling, for that hope."

"I think, Mr. Dacre," she said in a kind of wild dejection, "you know what kind of person I am, and all my faults; and this too I must tell you—I'm ambitious, not in the way the world esteems ambition, but if I were ever to like anyone, it must be one whom in secret my heart could be proud of. I thought I should never meet one, and I know not how it may be, and no one knows the height and depth of their own madness; but I think if I told you now never to come again, and sent you from me untried, I should have parted with my one wild hope. So you'll come again, and again, and again, till I know you better; and oh! what have I said!"

And she was silent. He too was silent,

radiant with happiness and pride. His heart fluttered up in the rekindled flame of hope, and his brain—the *camera obscura* within that handsome head—was already alight and astir with the scenery and figures of a hundred Quixotic plans and visions.

"And now my life is devoted, Challys, you'll see what I'll become."

Another little pause followed. Her hand was in her own possession now, her face was no longer pale and wild—the beautiful blush had returned.

"And now," said odd Challys Gray, with a sudden awaking to her old, grave, imperious manner, "you are to do exactly what I tell you; you resume exactly your old ways—and—no romance—*remember*—and —so go to the piano and sing me a song, for Julia Wardell is nodding, and we must awake her."

With a flush on his cheek also, and eyes unusually brilliant, he crossed the floor and obeyed.

It was but a verse or two of a little French song, and when it ended, good Mrs.

Wardell, who did not care that her nap should be suspected, said vivaciously—

"A thousand thanks! I think, Laura, he never sang so well as this evening; and he has kept it up so. I am sure we are extremely obliged. Ain't we, Laura?"

"It is very pretty. I like those gay little French things, with just a suspicion of sadness," said she.

"Something theatric, too — a pretty affectation," said Dacre. "The volatility and light enthusiasm of the people is in their music. Is there, I wonder, anywhere, a collection of the music of the Revolution? We know only two or three things—the *Marseillaise* and *Ca ira*, and no doubt there was character in them all—a romantic vein of ruffianism."

"That, I think, and refinement, are oftener found associated in France than anywhere else," said Laura Gray, talking, though with an effort, as usual.

"The French revolution was a very awful time. I've heard my dear mother talk about it as a thing she could remember," said Mrs.

Wardell. "The time when the poor King and Queen were so near getting over the frontier. It was so interesting, poor things, and so horribly provoking. What's that noise out there?"

"It must be my brougham," said Dacre, walking to the open window. "Yes, indeed, driving up to the door, as a hint to me that I am boring the horses to death by singing so much here."

At the same time the silvery ring of the little clock over the chimney told twelve.

"Twelve o'clock!" exclaimed Julia Wardell, who had counted carefully. I hadn't an idea. It is very rude of me; but you're so friendly, Mr. Dacre, you don't mind—and, Laura, my dear, you know you are never so late as this. How time glides away, especially when one listens to such music as Mr. Dacre makes."

"Yes," said Dacre, with a sigh, "I have quite exceeded my privilege."

He looked hesitatingly at Miss Gray; but she made no sign, and he dare not pro-

pose to out-stay Mrs. Wardell's out-spoken advice.

So "good-nights" were exchanged, and Dacre, with a wild elation at his heart, drove in a dream into town.

CHAPTER VIII.

VISITORS IN DE BEAUMIRAIL'S SITTING-ROOM.

In the Fleet Prison, now happily no more, Mr. de Beaumirail had two apartments,—as good, I dare say, as were to be had in that melancholy barrack of the broken-down soldiers of fortune. There was that gentleman's sitting-room, where he entertained his visitors—few and far between; and beyond it, his bed-room; melancholy apartments, where the day limped tediously away as Richard's night; and their solitary tenant, in his long silk dressing-gown, fluttered slowly back and forward, or moped sourly with his hands in his pockets at the windows.

Outside his own windows stood—two on each stone—four sooty scarlet geraniums, an anonymous souvenir of a damsel in

temporary distress, who had occupied a room on the other side, and who had fallen silently in love with him, while he, such is destiny, did not know her from Adam.

The windows were stained and mottled, as if, in that dingy climate, it rained always thin mud in summer, and snowed nothing but dust and soot-flakes in Christmas weather.

A neighbour—a Crown debtor, I believe, who was to emerge no more, and liked the songs of birds—had a blind canary which seemed to be always moulting, but sang very cheerfully, notwithstanding, from its cage, which hung outside the window, and gave De Beaumirail a share of its monotonous minstrelsy.

Good old Mr. Parker dropped in at about eleven o'clock in the morning, and found three gentlemen in Mr. de Beaumirail's sitting-room. He knew the suave Mr. Larkin. Mr. Levi, of the fierce black eyes, and sullen mouth, was also there; and the square white head and hard features of Mr. Gillespie also.

Mr. Larkin was delivering his ideas in his own engaging manner over a great old book like a ledger. There were sheets of papers there also tied up in pink tape and labelled, and a japanned tin box stood open on a chair close by, with a padlock dangling from it precariously.

Whatever they were talking about, they stopped abruptly on the entrance of the old man. The little Jew glared savagely at him, as if he was on the point of pulling him out by the ear; and Mr. Gillespie inquired surlily—"What's your will, sir?"

But Mr. Larkin recognised him, and greeting him with his large red hand, and his gracious smile, inquired sweetly whether he, Mr. Larkin, could do anything for Mr. Parker; observing with a slight elevation of his eyes, and a shake of his tall bald head, and a faint plaintive smile, that showed the sinister gaps which time had made at either side in his teeth—

"You find us, Mr. Parker, engaged, sir, in labours very unlike those happier ones in which it is your privilege, if I may so

say, to soar—the temporal concerns, sir, the unhappy complications which attend the affairs of a young man who lives as too many young men, it is to be feared, do live. A sad spectacle, sir, this we have before us; a melancholy history of a splendid inheritance, sold, as one may say, for a mess of pottage. Ah, sir, is not it melancholy—isn't it shocking, my dear Mr. Parker?"

Up went the big hands and the pink eyes as he spoke this sentence, and the tall bald head shook in solemn unison with the sentiment.

"But haven't you bought up his debts?" asked the old man, with a look of such simple and kindly inquiry, that Mr. Levi, who was glowering in his face, could not resist a sudden laugh—"boo-hoo, ha-ha!"—still looking straight in the face of the old gentleman, who returned his laugh with an offended look.

Mr. Larkin, had the grace of blushing, but it was an odd kind of blush, and tinged chiefly the narrow dome of his bald head.

"Perhaps that phrase does not quite accurately describe the risk which some friends of Mr. de Beaumirail have incurred very distinctly for his own advantage, Mr. Parker, which circumstance, perhaps, you would be so good as to mention to your informant, in the event of his again talking inaccurately with respect to the business of a gentleman whom—though in his sad circumstances he has long ceased to maintain professional relations anywhere—I am still happy, from motives which *you* will, perhaps, appreciate, to advise; and I hope I do so as zealously, whenever as a friend he happens to call upon me, as if his position were, in a worldly point of view, very different indeed."

"I know you very well, Mr. Larkin, better by reputation even than personally. I wish there were many such persons," said good Mr. Parker, in simple sincerity.

"Unprofitable servants, Mr. Parker," said the attorney, softly, dropping his red eyelids for a moment, and with his large hand waving away what his modesty received as a compliment—"we do but our duty, when

all's done; what more can we boast? *but* our duty, sir."

"And so lay up treasure, Mr. Larkin, where treasure is abiding," added good Mr. Parker, with eyes that smiled on the angelic man.

"And something nishe in conshols," drawled Mr. Levi, with a leer at the good attorney.

"But this is a little out of our way at present, Mr. Parker," said Larkin, hastily; "I am trying to look through these miserable intricacies—a tangled skein—how different a task from a few minutes' refreshing talk on happier themes with a gentleman and a Mentor—such as Mr. Parker; but business, upon this earth, sir, is, in fact, business; and can I do anything for you, Mr. Parker?"

"No, sir, I thank you; only I hoped to see Mr. de Beaumirail; he is not ill, I hope?"

"Oh dear, no; you'll find him in the next room; and I will say, my dear sir," he concluded, in an under tone, laying his big hand carelessly on the clergyman's arm, "I

am truly happy that you have looked in, for our poor friend is really in need of a word in season; his temper—his *temper* occasionally is—unpleasant, and he'll be all the better—you understand—a man in spiritual authority; things will be taken from you, you know," and so he bowed him to the threshold of the chamber, opening the door and closing it after him.

"That old muff's always up and down here, blesh him! I don't think I was twishe in this room, but I met him; and you and him gets into such a precious yarn always about your d——d shouls, and such rot!"

"Why the deil didn't you say he was walking down there in the court?" suggested Gillespie also, angrily.

"My *dear* sir! The thing that was not! Besides," he added, recollecting his company, "we'd have had him back in five minutes, Mr. Gillespie."

"Gad I'd a turned the key in the door, and when he'd a cooled his heels a bit on the stairs, he'd a gone home to where he came from, sir," said Gillespie.

Mr. Larkin glanced reflectively, with his under lip, after his habit in such moods, gently held between his finger and thumb, and for a moment, perhaps, the good man thought it might not have been a bad plan.

"But even *you*, Mr. Gillespie, will consider that we should have been sure to meet Mr. Parker again—and no—it would *not* have been right—for it would have excited suspicion—and—and not a word, sir, we say on business here, can possibly be heard in the next room. I've observed that, sir; so, ahem! as I was saying, you *may* lock the door, however—as I was saying, Mr. Gillespie, with respect to that promissory note, Mr. Jellicott's. I'm not, by any means, so sure, sir, that the statute protects him; and if he did pay it, sir, no doubt, Mr. Gillespie, he can show that he did so. Heaven forbid that any opportunity were denied him. I should despise myself if I were capable of anything in such a matter that was not perfectly straight and simple; but people should pay their debts."

"I'm not objecting to make him pay

twishe over, no more than you," said Mr. Levi; "but it was by cheque to order, and there's a note acknowledging receipt of cheque. I *know*—for his sholishitor's conducting man, Splinks, and me is as thick as —as you pleashe, and we'll make nothing of it."

And so these worthies debated and disagreed, and agreed again, over the schedule of old debts, which, according to their compact, Mr. de Beaumirail had made over to them, and of which they still hoped to make something.

CHAPTER IX.

DE BEAUMIRAIL VIEWS HIS SITUATION.

WHEN the old clergyman entered, De Beaumirail was sitting with his feet on the fender of a fire that had expired in ashes. The room was dim with cigar-smoke, and its dismal tenant, in his well-known dressing-gown, was puffing at his weed.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Parker, I'm miserable," said De Beaumirail, rising, as he threw his cigar into the ashes, and extending his hand to his visitor.

"I hope, my young friend, you are not suffering?" said Mr. Parker, looking with a kindly concern in his face, as he shook him by the hand.

"Miserably, sir," answered the prisoner.

"Ill?" said the clergyman.

"Ill?—yes; the time is out of joint. I'm

ill every way—all the nobler organs—heart, head, and—pocket. Who was ever well in despair? Ay, sir, I'm in hell. I hope, by-the-bye, you don't find the smoke unpleasant. I am in hell, Mr. Parker. You saw my Cerberus sitting outside—the beast that guards my door, with three monstrous *heads*—the white head, the bald head, and the black head—the Scot, the lawyer, and the Jew. I'm sold to that triple-headed monster. They have bought up my debts, sir. I'm a slave—Dickon is bought, and is sold."

"I have just heard, sir, that they have taken that step chiefly for your advantage."

"That is charming. Who said so?"

"Mr. Larkin, sir," said the clergyman.

"Mr. Larkin be d—d," said De Beaumirail. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Parker, I know I ought to have spoken in a more—round-about way. Pray what do you think of Mr. Larkin?"

"Mr. Larkin appears to me to be a truly exemplary and Christian man."

"So he appears to me; but he isn't. Mr.

Larkin is of this little epitome of hell in which I am a prisoner—the Satan-in-chief."

"Oh, Mr. de Beaumirail, my dear sir, *don't* you see how very shocking that way of speaking is? I do assure you, Mr. Larkin is one of the most entirely Christian men I ever met, that is, so far as I am yet acquainted with him; and I have had the pleasure of conversing with him a great deal more than with others whom I have known four or five times as long; and no man, in my opinion, can fail to make his true character known by his conversation after a time; it is impossible."

"When next he is coming the godly man over you, my dear sir," said De Beaumirail, "I'll give you a recipe to bring him to—himself."

"My dear Mr. de Beaumirail, I do assure you, reflections upon Mr. Larkin pain me extremely, you have no conception how much."

"Well, I don't want to pain you, Heaven knows; but I hate that fellow, because he's

the most odious of that direful set. I know everything about him; he does not fancy I do; and when next he performs his righteousness before you, just ask him from me whether he has any relations with Mr. Alfred Dacre."

"I should not like, sir, to pain Mr. Larkin, and I don't understand the subject."

"Pray do," said De Beaumirail.

"You can hardly be serious, sir; I could not talk to him *so*. I know him very slightly, and I don't know the meaning of your message."

"It means, sir, that he's capable of the most Satanic conspiracy that ever employed human malice and avarice for its instruments."

"Oh, my dear Mr. de Beaumirail!" exclaimed the good clergyman, reprovingly.

"Ay, sir, *my* malice and *other people's* avarice. But I'll not be used further, Mr. Larkin. In the dome of their pandemonium I'll break a hole, and let the light in."

"I don't understand, sir, how you can speak so bitterly," said Mr. Parker.

"Nor I, sometimes," said De Beaumirail, with a short strange laugh. "I sometimes think there is nothing on earth worth being bitter or sweet about."

"I am sure, Mr. de Beaumirail, if you knew the interest with which Mr. Larkin invariably speaks of you; he's at this moment working in the next room over your accounts. No paid agent, I am certain, could do it with a more praiseworthy diligence."

"Why, sir, the debts are his own; any rights I had are theirs, and they hold me here under a load of debt as big as Pelion, and I can't see the light nor stir my hand! And here, sir, I was to be their familiar spirit, and aid them in their atrocious enchantments!"

"Now, now, *pray*," remonstrated the clergyman.

"You're a theologian, and have read about Asmodeus. Of course you have all the devils at your fingers' ends, and the devil-on-two-sticks among them. If you were like me, sir, a spirit sealed down in a bottle by three such shabby and villanous

conjurors, you'd feel, and perhaps talk even, very like me."

"I came in to pay you a little visit, Mr. de Beaumirail——"

"You did very kindly, sir. The sight of a friendly face here is like a window opened in heaven. This place—you don't know what it is, sir—you don't know what it is. Some fellows seem to get accustomed to it, others never. A look forward of a year is like a perspective of seven; and the prospect of a whole life, it is eternity—despair."

"Sir, I still live in hope," began the clergyman.

"Ah, my dear sir," interrupted De Beaumirail, with a chilly laugh, "it is a strange flighty world, full of phantoms, hard to seize upon anything. I don't blame people—I don't blame myself—we are no better and no worse than others; but the whole thing is insane and miserable, and I believe if you could collect into one great funnel the groan and pant of all its sufferings, it would drown the music of the spheres."

"Man is born——" began Mr. Parker.

"I know, to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. Forgive me, sir, but I'm growing, I believe, unfit for human companionship, and more morose than a wounded bear."

"I'm always glad, sir, to hear a friend take a text of Scripture out of my mouth and finish it. I should be a very odd fellow to have charge of a parish—in an age when so few look into their Bibles—if I were offended by anyone's giving me proof that he knew the Scriptures."

"Have you been looking after my interests still?—you are always so good. Have you seen the people at Guildford House?"

"I didn't tell you, did I, about my last visit? I went to tea there a night or two ago," asked old Mr. Parker.

"No—nothing—how was it?"

"Nothing, but merely that I did no good, sir. No, no; it was, in fact, imposed upon me that I should not open the subject."

"And my friend Dacre goes there, doesn't

he? He has not softened Miss Gray in my behalf, I dare say?"

"I fear not, Mr. de Beaumirail; no, I think not."

"You don't suppose I expected any such thing?" said the captive.

"I don't know, sir; but Mr. Dacre, I believe, is intimate there. I wish very much he were more your friend than you suppose him."

"You think he has an influence, then?" said De Beaumirail.

"I—I rather *do*," answered the clergyman, simply.

"And why?"

"The elder lady, a Mrs. Wardell, who, I assume, from her age and superior experience, is naturally looked up to by Miss Gray, talked a great deal of him. He had been there to tea that night, and she spoke very favourably of him indeed, and as if he was there very often, and on a sudden she seemed to recollect herself as if she ought not to have mentioned him. I think I saw the young lady look at her;

perhaps she said something; I don't know."

"Well, the upshot is that only the old lady mentioned him?"

"Yes, only Mrs. Wardell."

"Well, you know she could do nothing."

"Except by her authority with Miss Gray," suggested Mr. Parker.

"I don't believe, sir, that young ladies now-a-days are troubled with much awe of their elders. Besides, I explained before, Miss Gray has no longer the power to release me. So now, sir, I'll try another way—I'll turn the wheel—try a new course, and strike a smashing blow at the villains who are dissecting me in the next room."

De Beaumirail, with his clenched hands in his dressing-gown pockets, shook his head as he thus spoke, and smiled with so resolute a frown, that good Mr. Parker was almost frightened.

"My good friend," said he, "I have often told you that patience is a prayer in itself, and implored of you also, if you cannot control either such feelings or the expres-

sion of them, at least, in kindness, to spare me the pain of witnessing such ungoverned bursts of feeling."

De Beaumirail made no answer, but looked for a time gloomily out of the window.

"Suppose you come and have a cup of tea with me to-morrow evening? I have a book to give you," said he.

"I'm afraid I can't, my dear friend," said Mr. Parker.

"But why not?" pleaded De Beaumirail.

"It is my night for preparing my sermon. I can't leave it to Saturday, which is one of my fatiguing days, and the evening finds me tired and very little good for."

"Ah! your sermon? I daren't interfere with that, sir. For where a sermon's in the case, all other things, of course, give place," said De Beaumirail, slightly modifying the quotation. "But if not to-morrow, come to-night."

"I promised to dine at Guildford House," said Mr. Parker.

"Oh — that's very well — at Guildford

House. Well, then you may meet Mr. Dacre there?"

"He was not mentioned—no one, in fact. I think it was to be quite to ourselves. But why should you suppose Mr. *Dacre?*"

"Because one of my people tells me he is perpetually in and out there," said De Beaumirail. "I hope you may light upon him."

"I don't see, sir, exactly why. I don't know him. I knew but one of that family. If he is one of the Dacres of Chezledon——"

"Yes, so he is."

"Well, I knew but one of that family, and he's dead—poor young man. I saw him often in his last illness, and attended his funeral."

"He was the son of Harry Dacre of Chezledon, wasn't he? His name was Alfred Dacre?"

"So it was, sir," acquiesced Mr. Parker.

"And he is the person who visits at Guildford House," said De Beaumirail.

The clergyman smiled and shook his head.

"Ah, sir, impossible, for the reason I

told you. Poor Mr. Alfred Dacre, I should be happy that he were still among us."

"Well, sir," continued De Beaumirail, without in the least minding Mr. Parker's little difficulty, "I am very anxious you should see him there. I should so like to know on what terms he is received, for I think I might possibly make him useful to me still. When were you last at Guildford House?"

"I drank tea, I mentioned, a few days ago."

"And going to dine to-day? They have taken quite a fancy to you. You'll soon have an influence as powerful as Dacre's in that house. I've an idea of a way in which some good may yet be done for me, if you two were only to put your heads together over my lamentable case."

The clergyman smiled faintly, and nodded; and De Beaumirail understood that there was passing in his mind the thought how obstinately that crazy prisoner will adhere to his fixed idea, and insist that Alfred Dacre is still living.

"Sooner or later, you know, you must meet, and then you'll mention me, and find out how he's disposed," said De Beaumirail.

"Sooner or later, perhaps, but not in this world, sir," replied the clergyman.

"We shall see, sir. Well, then, you are going?"

"Yes, a very hurried visit."

"I wish you believed in holy water, and that I had some to offer you; you need some prophylactic against the powers of evil as you pass through that room; will you excuse my going with you to the door? I shiver at sight of those villains, and can hardly answer for myself."

"Farewell, sir, good-by."

And the old clergyman took his leave, again entering the ante-room, and disturbing the little parliament of pandemonium,—two of whose members, at least, looked sourly enough at the gentle intruder, who quickly made his exit.

CHAPTER X.

TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET.

THIS evening, at Guildford House, Alfred Dacre turned up as usual.

When he entered the drawing-room, Julia Wardell had not yet appeared, and Laura was seated in her usual place near the window.

Old Mr. Parker was sipping his coffee in the library in the agreeable company of Mrs. Wardell.

"I thought you'd come upstairs," said Miss Gray. "So I left my cousin Julia for a few minutes to take care of our good old friend, Mr. Parker. I wrote to tell you—I suppose you got my note—that he was coming."

"Oh, yes, thank you very much."

"And that we should give him his tea in

the library, as you did not care to meet him," she continued.

"I am so sorry you should have put yourself at all out of your way, but it *is* better I should not meet him just now."

The fact is, Miss Gray's warning had not reached him; and if it had, I don't think he would have gone to Guildford House that evening.

"And he was talking of going away when I came here, a few minutes ago, so I'm sure he's not going to stay very much longer," said she.

There was somehow a little consciousness, and a constraint also, in their meeting. They were talking as yet very much as they used to do, before the scene of last night; he could not discover in her reception of him any marked change. He fancied that if there was any alteration, it was that there had occurred just that slight but appreciable change of temperature which is perceived within the half-hour after sunset on an autumn evening—a faint chill.

A little graver—her wise little head per-

haps a little more cogitative than usual—still there was nothing to alarm him, for there was the soft blush, and in her eyes was that liquid fire which poets describe.

He sat beside her, and he said in a very low tone, "You are not vexed, I hope, at my having come?"

"No, indeed—no, Mr. Dacre—I should have been very much vexed if you had not come. I should have thought it quite unaccountable, and very unkind."

"I was so afraid, I thought I had done something to give you pain."

"No; I should have told you so."

"Then, you regret—oh *do* you regret—having allowed me to speak even the few words I said yesterday?"

"I have been, since then, more unhappy. I am in a labyrinth; I have lost my way, and I have been silent. I have been troubling myself with the thought that you might have fancied I had said that which I never meant to say, for I do not know whether I shall ever like anyone on earth more than as a very good friend. I hope

you are not vexed with me, Mr. Dacre; but I could not bear to appear to mislead you, or to have said more than I meant."

"No one, Miss Gray, could ever misunderstand you. But, oh! do not mistake *me*, and add to your warning, words that mean despair."

"I have said nothing—I want you to understand that I have said nothing; and you will stay here until Julia and I can come up; you are not to go away, you know—I came up to prevent that. I'll think you are vexed with us if you do. Poor old Mr. Parker—he's so good. He has been so kind and patient with me; and I know he can't understand me—I hardly do myself—about that miserable affair, that we must be kind to him—that is all, not very much—that is in my power; I like him so much; I like him so *very* much. He says he is writing some work, and he was looking at the French folio engravings of eastern cities and scenery with so much interest, that I told him to come as often as he likes, and I intend to make him go to

Gray Forest next month, when his little holidays begin. But till then don't be uncomfortable, or fancy that you are likely to meet him here, for he shall have the library to himself; and you know you can't meet; and he goes home so early—in fact just about the time you usually come. I half blame myself, I was so afraid, after I had done it, that you might think there was danger of his meeting you here."

So spoke Miss Gray, and paused, looking at him.

"I have to make a call, very near this, merely a word or two, and I shall be back again. I looked in to say so, and it turns out luckily, for old Mr. Parker will have gone away by that time. In a day or two it wont matter whether I meet him or not, but just at this moment it would not do; so, for half an hour, I say good-bye."

As Dacre walked down the steps he said to himself, with a dissatisfied laugh—

"How oddly things turn out—this good old simpleton is about to become a fixture here, and I must sooner or later meet him

face to face. I hope he wont lose his wits. He'll precipitate things a little, I dare say, and whether for good or evil I can't conjecture. What a world! To think of *me*, of all men, gliding off my path into this desperate romance!"

He glanced toward the library window and sighed.

"If something like this had come earlier; but what vainer than regrets? Might there have been a happy life?—but as it is I scarcely dare look at it, for what good remains except the melancholy glory of a self-sacrifice?"

In this there was, of course, something of that self-conceit in which, like other young men, he was principled. But in his heart the ruling idolatry is declining—"the great god Pan is dead"—and a truer and holier worship is superseding that selfish superstition which had burnt a perpetual incense, and offered up so many sacrifices before his own handsome image.

Along with the opening of a nobler nature, there opens a deeper melancholy—a loftier

heaven, a profounder hell. This young man, yet old in the world's ways, bright, cold, and trenchant, as a beautiful steel weapon, was at first shocked and then perplexed by the discovery that he had a heart —that in a barren field he had found a treasure, for which no imaginable price was too great. Dacre's carriage stood scarcely thirty yards down the short avenue; as he loitered on the steps in his dream, he fancied that he heard the library door open, and with a sudden recollection he ran down the steps, got into his carriage, and drove away.

In the meantime, in the library Mr. Parker had re-established himself in his chair, and was entertaining the ladies with a plan he had conceived of exploring the upper extremity of the Red Sea by means of diving-bells, and a competent troop of navvies, for the purpose of bringing to light such relics of Pharaoh's host, as he was prepared to show, chemically and geologically, must still lie, very nearly uninjured, under the deposit.

Half an hour, nearly, had passed pretty much in this kind of discourse, when the servant, to Miss Gray's secret relief, came in to inform Mr. Parker that a man living in his parish had called to beg he would return to visit a dying person, and saying that he had got a cab outside the gate, and would wait there for Mr. Parker.

"Hadn't he better tell him to bring his cab to the door?" said Miss Gray.

But Mr. Parker said no. He preferred walking down, and would bid his friends good night now—and so at last was quite gone.

On the steps where Dacre but a short time before had stood in his soliloquy, the old clergyman also paused, and from that platform for a moment looked up in silent adoration upon the myriad shining stars that gleamed through the dark blue space above him, the manifestation of the Creator's glory and power illimitable; and in the sublime and tender rapture of that expansion the good old man walked down the short but shadowy avenue, and having

emerged from the gate, he looked to the right and to the left—but saw only one figure—that of a gentleman with a short cloak on, who was walking toward him, but with the air of a man bent on a more distant route, walking at a firmer and more rapid pace than a mere lounger waiting for an arrival. He approached and passed him by without a symptom of observation or recognition. So there was no one awaiting him, and no sign of a cab. Mr. Parker walked slowly down toward the main Brompton road, looking out as keenly as he could for the person who had summoned him to return to his duties.

He had not walked forty steps when he was overtaken, and a hand from behind was gently laid upon his shoulder.

"Running away from me, Mr. Parker?" said the voice in an undertone.

Mr. Parker halted and was silent, peering with wrinkled brows earnestly in his face, but that face was somewhat muffled as well as shaded by his broad-leafed hat, and the night was dark.

"You—did *you* call for me?" inquired the clergyman.

"Yes, this moment, a sick call—a sick parishioner; let's come on to that lamp at the corner, where we can see one another."

The clergyman paused, still looking at him, and he said, hesitating—

"It is *very* odd—but certainly, sir—let us go."

And as they walked, he involuntarily peeped more than once at his companion.

CHAPTER XI.

COLLOQUY.

"I BEG your pardon," said Mr. Parker, whose curiosity was excited; "but may I ask, am I acquainted with you, or have I ever been?"

"Yes, sir, you once were, and I hope to restore myself to your recollection when we reach that lamp; but I have one stipulation to make."

"Very good, sir," said the clergyman.

"And that is, that you don't utter my name," said the person who walked by his side.

"Not to mention your name?" repeated Mr. Parker.

The stranger stopped short.

"No, not to *utter* it, now or after. If you promise this as a Christian man, I'll

go on; but if you hesitate, I turn about and you see me no more."

"Sir, I do make you the promise; I think you have a perfect right to exact it; and pray what *is* your name?"

"I don't mean to mention it."

"Are you, sir—are you a Mr. Dacre?" asked Mr. Parker, again hesitating, and speaking in a very low tone, but with a species of excitement.

"I'll first try whether you recognise me, please; I don't want to say my name, if it is to be avoided, for stone walls have ears; and observe, I hold you strictly to your promise."

"Of course. I only meant to ask, are you related to Mr. Alfred Dacre, son of Mr. Dacre, of Chezledon?"

"We shall have light enough, in one minute more, to answer your question without speaking, if you will only have the goodness to walk on."

"If you were to raise your voice ever so little I think I should guess," said Mr. Parker, still hesitating. "It isn't curiosity,

sir, it is that there were some unpleasant things; and, in fact, I should prefer, if any meeting is to take place between any member of that family and me, that it should not occur in this way. It should be, sir, for very many reasons, a little more formally."

"At the lamp at that angle, sir, we can see in both directions and all around. I have only a few words to say, but I should like to see that no one else is near; and as to meeting more formally, as you say, I don't think I shall mind it."

"I said, sir, what was in my mind. I think, if there is anything to talk over, it had better be in my house, or anywhere else, where a quiet interview may take place. But I am speaking hypothetically, and in any case, rather than part with you as you alternatively propose, you can of course talk to me here, or where you please."

He had by this time come close to the lamp which he had already indicated as their halting place. It stood where the

dead wall, overtopped by trees, under the foliage of which they had been walking, made a slight bend, affording a clear view up and down the narrow road, and shedding light enough to prevent a surprise by either approach.

"Don't mind naming me, Mr. Parker; but it does seem odd you don't know me. Now, sir, look—here I am."

He let his cloak fall backward a little upon his shoulders, and raised his hat. It was Alfred Dacre who stood before him, smiling. He even laughed gently, as Mr. Parker stepped a little tremulously back with a stare and gape of dumb astonishment.

He drew nearer to the amazed old gentleman, and laying his hand softly to his breast, he said, still smiling, but in a very low tone—

"Don't say my name—pray don't—remember you promised; and now I'll tell you something of my plans, if you allow me."

"My gracious!—Good heavens!—I can scarcely believe my eyes—I am bewildered, sir," said the old man.

"We need not stand here, you know," said Dacre. "It was only for the discovery, and let us walk on. I've learned this, that people are sometimes watched when they don't suspect it."

"Then it was you, sir," began Mr. Parker deliberately, "was it, who sent in——"

"Just now, to tell you that a sick parishioner wanted you. Yes; and sick enough, just now, in head and heart I am, Mr. Parker, and actually lodging in your parish. Could I have more exactly said the truth?" said Dacre.

"Well, sir, I certainly never in all my life was half so much amazed," repeated Mr. Parker, taking breath.

"Don't—don't, pray, allude to *anything*," said Dacre, glancing quickly over his shoulder. "I may be led into trouble if you talk. Let us turn back and walk a little the other way. Thanks."

"I'm afraid, sir, I ought to be on my way home. Could not I see you early to-morrow?" asked the old clergyman.

"You ought? Why you *are* on your

way home. You'll lose twenty minutes, perhaps, waiting for a 'bus, and not be set down after all near your own house. Now, *I*'m going to set you down at your own door in my brougham, and all that will save twice as much time as I shall detain you."

"Well, sir, yes—if it doesn't put you out of your way. I shall be very much obliged."

Dacre smiled as he told him how happy he should be, for in the old man's face was still the wild and amazed look of a man just startled by an alarm from his sleep.

"You were at Guildford House, Mr. Parker? I had an antipathy to some people there—not unnatural—but I've changed my mind. Miss Gray, in whom you take an interest, I have saved from the greatest danger she ever was, or ever will be, in. No matter what or how. I'll explain another time—perhaps. A circle of fraud has been drawn round that young lady; but I am master of the charm—it shan't prevail; it can't unless I choose. But I go my own way about it, and you must keep

faith with me; nothing must be known of me at Guildford House, except what they already know. There I am Mr. Alfred Dacre, and as to all the rest they are, and must remain, in utter darkness till I enlighten them. Do you return there to-night? No, I forgot."

"No, sir, no. I've rather outstaid my time," said he.

"Yes, it can't happen to-night; but it may in a day or two. Remember, I've a hard card to play. I have three of the most suspicious villains in London watching me; and when you meet me at Guildford House, if it should happen, remember I am its guardian angel, and you betray me to my worst enemies if you divulge one syllable of my story."

"But, sir, I can't be accessory to anything at all of the nature of a deception," said Mr. Parker, a little shocked.

"I ask only silence," said his companion. "That is always understood where one honourable man places another in possession of his secret. I don't think that either

honour or religion imposes upon the confidant the perfidy of divulging it."

"Sir, I only say—*peremptorily*—that anything indirect, though never so little, I will have neither act nor part in," said Mr. Parker, resolutely.

"Well, then, this you may promise—they know perfectly that you know me, for I told them so; they are aware that Ardenbroke—Lord Ardenbroke, you know—knows me also. He gave me a promise not to mention anything more than I had told them myself, and he has kept his word. I don't think it too much to expect from you, who are not, as he is, a relation, to observe the same reticence about that which in no respect concerns you?" said Mr. Dacre, petulantly.

"I shall volunteer no information, sir," said Mr. Parker. "But I think I ought not to have been placed in this situation."

"And if questions should be put to you, you will say, as Ardenbroke did, that you are under promise to mention *nothing* about me—that's fair," insisted Mr. Dacre.

"Yes, sir—*that* I may say, and I will," said the clergyman.

"Very well, sir. And now, Mr. Parker, one other kindness. I shall go back to Guildford House to-night, as I find you are positively not returning; but I should not care to meet you there, and simply for this reason, that I should not like to trust too much to anyone's presence of mind; people, you know, can't be always thinking of one thing, and always on their guard; and it would be very unpleasant to me, and I fancy not very pleasant to you. So, as I never go there till about this hour, could you manage to make your visits earlier; and if they want you to dine or drink tea there, you can say, 'I have no objection in the world,' but that there would be an awkwardness in your meeting me—only don't, of course, put it in a way that would make them fancy me a person whom you would not associate with; it is very easy to say that there is a circumstance—reflecting no discredit—which yet would make our meeting embarrassing," said Dacre. "Can't you say that?"

"Yes, I may; I'm sure I can say that," answered Mr. Parker.

"And I'm going to tell you more: I have no one to speak to but you, and I must tell it. Let us turn again here, and walk towards my trap—I mean, my brougham. I promise it shan't keep you longer than five minutes; and I should die if I had no one to talk to."

"Five minutes, sir; but it really mustn't exceed that," said Mr. Parker.

So, walking side by side, his companion in a low tone addressed him.

CHAPTER XII.

AGAIN AT GUILDFORD HOUSE.

"WHEN I contemplate my position," said Mr. Dacre, "I am as much amazed as you are. I have got myself into a strange situation—another time I'll tell you how. It is too long a story for our five minutes' walk. For the present I shall content myself with asking a favour."

"Say what it is you wish, sir," replied the clergyman.

"Your voice is that of a man who is willing to help his friend," said Alfred Dacre, turning toward him with a dark and sudden smile.

"I make no promises, sir, until I shall have heard the nature of the assistance you require," said he.

"Well, that's reasonable; only speak a

little lower," said Mr. Dacre, looking around him with a sharp glance. "You have a brother holding high rank in the Austrian army; you must write to him about me."

"So I shall, with pleasure, sir; provided you can show me how my doing so can be of any use to you," said Mr. Parker.

"That is something off my mind, sir," said he. "I'll show you how to-morrow."

"Then you may reckon upon me, sir."

"And—and one thing more; but don't exclaim when I tell it to you."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean whatever you decide," said Alfred Dacre, almost in a whisper, having first glanced furtively about him again. "Pray don't raise your voice or express the least surprise. I tell you I don't know who may be near."

"Very well, sir."

"I want you to do me a great kindness."

"What is it, sir?"

"And you must not mention it anywhere. It is a secret, mind."

"Well, sir, whether I do your commission

or not, I'll not betray your secret," said Mr. Parker.

"Let us turn the other way, for a moment," said Alfred Dacre. "Listen—I've made up my mind to go abroad immediately. Now don't—*don't*, pray, say a word; and you must get my passport. Pray, oblige me. I'll see you in the morning, and tell you fifty things that will surprise you; and you wont refuse me. Now, I know you are surprised; so you need not tell me. But only say you will do me this last and vital kindness?"

"Sir, I really——" began the clergyman.

"Must think about it, and I know that will end in your doing it," interrupted Dacre. "You have always been so kind."

He pressed his arm with his hand as he said this, and looked very earnestly in his face, like a man who has a great stake trembling upon another's decision.

"Yes, you know sufficiently well," said Mr. Parker, "that you may always reckon upon me, within the limit of duty, to the

full extent of my opportunities. But I should prefer, as you say, thinking it over; in fact, I could not consent to take any step in the matter without knowing more about it, and being quite clear that I should be doing right; and—I'll sleep upon it, if you please," and with a sigh he looked in his face for a moment, and looking up again he said—

"It seems to me so incredible—a dream —quite a dream!"

"My whole life seems to me one long dream. No wonder one of its oddest passages should seem so to you. There is my brougham, however—one of its few realities, you'll find it, if you trust it to leave you at home. So, good-night, and you'll see me in the morning, and then I'll unroll a bit of the future, as odd—as odd as the strange cartoon of the past, in which, in every change of scenery, amid a throng of admirers or oppressors, crowned or bleeding, the athlete contends with fortune."

"I hope, sir, it may all end well. Heaven grant it!" said Mr. Parker, as he stepped

into the carriage, the door of which Dacre had opened.

"Better end any way than go on *wrong*," said Dacre as he shut the door; "and when the hour comes, and it is time to part, I'll take off my hat, and say good-night."

And as he spoke he smiled and raised his hat, and the servant, previously instructed, drove rapidly away to leave Mr. Parker at home.

Away went the carriage, leaving Dacre alone at the broad confluence of the lane down which they had walked, and the great Brompton highway. It was very quiet that night; scarcely a footstep heard up or down the dry pathway; the rumble of a distant 'bus, the bark of a few lonely dogs, and the whistling of a fellow who stood outside the Bull and Horns, were the only sounds then audible. Mr. Dacre looked up and down the pathway shrewdly, then climbed the low wall that fenced the lane. There was no sign of a listener near. In high spirits he jumped down again to the road, and smiling in the dark as he passed under

the trees, which in that place over-arched the lane, he walked swiftly back again to Guildford House.

He saw the lights in the drawing-room as he approached, and he ran up the stairs wild with the spirits of excitement.

"I've returned, Miss Gray, and have transacted my little business, and feel happier than ever school-boy did when dismissed for the holidays," he said.

"That's very good of you," said Mrs. Wardell, taking some of this speech to herself, with a gracious smile; "and we are very glad to see you, also. We are, indeed, always, Mr. Dacre."

"How can I thank you?" said he, gaily, and with a glance toward Miss Gray. "It is delightful to find a welcome, especially so far from home, and where one's merits are so few and small, and the privilege—so immense."

"And I hope, from what you say, your teazing business is now quite over," said Mrs. Wardell, "and that your time will be more at your disposal."

"Yes; my business is nearly ended!" said he. "I hope to-morrow will conclude it, and emancipate a slave."

As he thus spoke, Miss Laura Gray fancied there was in his face an exultation beyond the gay sense of relief which he implied.

"Are you going to sing for us? do, pray," said Mrs. Wardell.

"No, pray, no; you wont ask me to-night."

"And why not, Mr. Dacre?" asked Mrs. Wardell.

"Because I'm too happy," he answered.

"Now that is no reason," said Julia Wardell. "Laura, why don't you join me? You know, Mr. Dacre, that is no reason; tell him so, Laura."

"But I think it *is* a reason," said Laura.

"A thousand thanks, Miss Gray," said he; "I feared no one could understand it but myself, and yet it is true."

"Well, that is highly metaphysical, I suppose," said Mrs. Wardell, "and I don't pretend to understand it. Do we, my dar-

ling little old precious Mousey? No, we don't, not a bit of it."

The latter question was to her little dog.

"But haven't you come unusually late, Mr. Dacre, this evening?" inquired Mrs. Wardell.

"So I have, but inevitably, need I say? and earlier, too, than usual I must go, but all to regain my liberty the sooner," said Mr. Dacre. "I promised to meet some people to-night upon business. I'm tired of business—I hate it; but when you have counted the last mile-stone, you almost forgive the journey its tediousness."

"Yes, indeed, country mile-stones, very true, and a very tiresome occupation it is, we know, Laura, don't we? Nearly seventy miles we drove up here; such a journey from Gray Forest, dust and everything; would you believe it, I actually fell asleep on the way?" said Julia Wardell.

"I've had a more tedious journey still, Mrs. Wardell; not a journey, however, to make one sleep, by any means; and, oh dear! how glad I shall be to set my foot

on the ground once more, and, escaping from the dust and rumble, to see the sky and green leaves, far from the deafening high-road of life. There was a time, Miss Gray, when I liked noise and glare, and not very long since. I think I'm changed; I hardly know myself."

"I forgot to tell you," said Mrs. Wardell, "you'll be glad to hear that poor Charles Mannering is ever so much better, and likely very soon to be out and about again."

"Oh! I haven't heard, as you know, for a day or two: my friend has not been looking after him since he began to get all right so rapidly."

"Did I give you his letter, Laura?" inquired Julia Wardell.

"No; you read it aloud when you were in the library."

"So I did. Dear me, I've forgot it there." And Mrs. Wardell waddled off in a fuss, and lighted her candle on the lobby, and went down to the library, for there were things in that letter which she did not care to have seen by curious eyes, and while she

was away Alfred Dacre sat down near Laura Gray, and, said he—

"You have commanded me to be very formal, Miss Gray, and I must obey; but there are times when silence is torture, and I have so many things to say, and time is so short."

"Time so short, Mr. Dacre, do you mean to-night?"

"I mean altogether. I mean that before a week, probably, I shall have to leave England."

"Oh, I did not understand; but only for a short time; it wont be for long, surely?"

"No, no, that is, I hope not; I may remain longer there, however; delays may occur, but—but it seems to me inevitable that I should go for a time, and, if my hours *are* measured, to lose one of them is anguish."

"Now; is this fair? Aren't you talking heroics? and if you do, I can't follow you, and your soliloquy is quite contrary to your promise, and you must not—no, *no*, you *shan't*, and I wont excuse you if you do."

Miss Gray stood up quite in earnest, with eyes that flashed, and a brilliant colour, as she said these words, and Alfred Dacre heard them with a pang and a chill.

Perhaps he ought to have read all this quite differently, and known that this peremptoriness indicated only her distrust of herself.

"Of course, I obey," he said sadly; "and now the hour has arrived which I cannot outstay. I appointed to meet some people whom it is essential to see—whom I must see, in fact, or things will be so complicated that I shall be unable to act; I can't explain it, bit by bit. You must have the entire case before you, and all together; and, as I said, you soon shall——you shall——and in that true story, beautiful Challys Gray, you will understand how I have——adored you."

She was looking down at her little foot, with the same beautiful flush in her cheeks, very gravely. She did not raise her eyes. He hesitated for a moment, and then with a sigh, and without another word, he left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH MR. DACRE VISITS THREE CONVIVIAL GENTLEMEN.

"SHALL I ever know myself again?" said Dacre, with a kind of shudder, as he drove away. "I can't give her up. I'm enchanted, and yet my plain course is to bid her good-bye, and go to my room, and—cut my throat."

He had fallen into a habit of watching the light in the window as long as it remained in sight. As the carriage turned the corner at the gate, he kissed his hand toward that disappearing light, and a mist was in his eyes, and he whispered, "Darling, darling, good night." And then he threw himself back in the carriage with a great sigh.

"I believe it is impossible to think alone,

either that, or I'm going mad. I can arrange nothing, there's not one clear idea in my mind. I believe in such utter solitude of mind, and agitation of heart, connected thought is unattainable. One hour, one thing, the next, another, the eddies and undulations of chaos. Now for my scoundrels. I had no idea what a wretch I was until my impetus failed, and my scheme stood lifeless before me."

He looked out of the carriage window—"Where are we now? Ho! Trafalgar-square. We shall soon see them—instruments, masters, accomplices. What! How slowly this beastly thing gets along."

Nevertheless, it was getting on at a very good pace. But Mr. Dacre was impatient, and his fever heightened as he drew near the trysting-place, and often popped his head out of the window, and throwing himself back, kicked his heel against the opposite cushion in irrepressible restlessness.

At length the carriage stopped at Mr. Gillespie's door, and Dacre jumped out as it opened.

"Mr. Gillespie upstairs?" he asked of the maid.

Yes, he was; and two gentlemen were with him at supper; and he expected a gentleman, Mr. Dacre, to come, and ordered that he should be shown up on his arrival.

As Dacre ran up the stairs, he laughed low to himself, and delivered a double knock on Mr. Gillespie's drawing-room door with the head of his cane.

Alfred Dacre was approaching these gentlemen in an unwonted mood, not quite hilarious, nor yet familiar, for there were latent in it the cynicism and banter of suppressed scorn.

Three persons were in Mr. Gillespie's drawing-room when Mr. Dacre opened the door. They sat in the fragrance of whisky-punch, which he had brewed, after the old fashion, in a bowl, and under a canopy of tobacco-smoke.

Mr. Levi sat near the fire, with his heels on a chair, smoking a great cigar, and blowing his clouds in thin streams toward the ceiling. The Scottish intonation of

Mr. Gillespie was heard in loud and genial harshness, as he recited his repertory of lying old stories for the amusement of his guests. Opposite to him sat Mr. Larkin, with a celestial smile, which went far to sanctify that equivocal gathering. He and his host were alike tinted with that agreeable rosiness with which punch suffuses cheeks, chins, noses, and even heads, when they are bald.

"Come in, sir, ye'r welcome, mon, and sit ye doun," said the host, who, as getting fou and unco' happy, had expanded as on all occasions of excitement, pleasurable or otherwise, was his wont, into his broad Scotch. "And what the deil's gane wi' that idle limmer, that should 'a brought us up the broiled bones half an hour ago? Pull the bell, Mr. Levi, if it's not inconvenient, and we'll have them up in no time; and sit ye doun; nane but friends here, sir, and there's a plate for ye, and a knife and fork, and the hizzie's coming with a bit broil, for it's ill speakin' between a fou man and a fasting; no need of introduction to

the company, sir. I think ye'll a spoken wi' my friend Mr. Larkin, and Mr. Levi, over the way, before now," he added, with a sly jocularity.

"Making merry, sir," said Mr. Larkin with a heavenly smile, and his nose and other features in an unusual glow. "In an innocent way, my friend Mr. Gillespie—he'll allow me to call him so—would insist on his hospitable privileges; and we have all heard the Caledonian proverb, it's good, sir, to be merry and wise—merry *and* wise, sir. You see the force, Mr. Mr.——"

"*Dacre*," said that gentleman. "Yes, Mr. Larkin, merry and wise; or as we south of the Tweed would say, tipsy and sober."

"I trust not the former, sir," said Mr. Larkin, with a momentary grandeur. "I humbly trust not, sir. We are nowhere forbidden——"

"Oh, no," interrupted Dacre, "nowhere but in the streets, and then they fine you five shillings, which leaves an attorney but one and eightpence from his last fee."

"Ah, ha, Mr., Mr. Dacre, you are amusing; I'm always diverted when you please to be so. I can't say, however, that I do much in legal practice. I've been much more connected with land; my friends lie chiefly in that direction. I have the honour to know a good many persons—old friends, attached more or less to my family—persons of distinction, in fact, and I have been drawn very much into the direction of their estates, and—liking me, and knowing all about me, so that——"

"That's all so interesting, Mr. Larkin," said Mr. Dacre, "and—no, thanks, I'll not take any," he said, waving away the glass of punch which Mr. Gillespie had ladled from the bowl, and now presented. "But though I shan't drink any myself, you must all fill bumpers, for I've come to tell you this, we are on the point of—victory!"

"Victory!—Hout, mon, do you mean—" exclaimed Gillespie.

Mr. Larkin, with his small rat-like eyes, looked on him intently, and Mr. Levi lowered his cigar, and with his great mouth

agape, glared on him with his lurid black eyes.

"Mean? Of course I mean immediate and certain, gentlemen. Jews, Christians, Scotchmen, fill your glasses, and drink to our success," cried Mr. Dacre, giving the table a blow with his hand, that made plates and glasses jump and jingle, and caused the liquor in the punch-bowl to dance in concentric rings. "And if you don't fill your glasses, this moment, to the brim, I'll smash that bowl with a blow of my stick, and cut the heads off your candles at a stroke. Come, gentlemen, we are all friends, as you say."

"All friends," they acquiesced in various tones of alacrity. "For as the great Roman martyr and moralist, Cataline, said—'*Idem velle atque idem nolle, id demum firma amicitia est.*' D—n you, drink your odious mixtures when I command you."

"Here, Larkin, ye deevil's buckie, drink this. I tauld ye amang us, we'd mak a spune, or spoil a horn," cried Gillespie, in high elation, forcing the tumbler of punch

which Dacre had declined into Larkin's hand, not minding though the nectar trickled over that good man's knuckles.

"Hollandsh and water for me," said Mr. Levi, preparing accordingly.

"And what for no — Leeberty Hall, gentlemen, and here's the hizzie wi' the broiled banes, sir. Set it down here, lassie, and awa' wi' ye. That will do, shut to the door. And noo, sirs, we'll drink to our success, sirs, and three times three."

Laughing gently at the absurdity of the ceremonial, Mr. Larkin, whose heart was beating fast with the ardour of avarice, and finding that he was in for it, joining with a childlike, smiling simplicity that was very delightful to witness.

"Drink it all, sir. I've another toast to give you," cried Mr. Dacre.

So, with three times three, hip-hip, hurrah, and so forth, in their boyish mirth these innocent souls honoured Mr. Dacre's toast, and Mr. Larkin playfully finished his honest bumper.

"And how soon, sir, by what day, Mr.,

Mr. *Dacre*, when is the rent-day, sir? Ye ken what I mean; is it fixed yet? 'twill come betimes, I warrant, hey?" said Mr. Gillespie, with a greedy chuckle, rubbing his hands.

"In a week or ten days," said Mr. Dacre.

Mr. Gillespie made a great gasp, and an oath, and his hard-featured countenance puckered up with delight, like the face of a hoary old chimpanzee, while Mr. Levi bounced up with a loud "hooray!" and added with an oath of his own—"Then that stock's looking up; newshe for the governor," and another "hooray."

"And if it were permitted me," said the bland voice of Mr. Larkin, "as in a friendly way, we are this evening indulging in a little good-humoured badinage (he pronounced the word as it is spelt), I may be permitted to return Mr. ——, my esteemed friend's toast, by proposing the health of a person of very first-class merit indeed, whom we all here present desire to see happily united—a lady residing not a hundred miles from Old Brompton, and whom I may name as——"

"Name any lady of my acquaintance—*dare* to name her, and by heaven, I'll fling you out of that window."

The accent of frenzy with which Dacre almost shrieked this threat was so sudden, his face was so bloodless, his eyes gleamed such livid hatred, and the clenched hand that was advanced toward the dumb-stricken attorney quivered with such extremity of passion, that the spectacle resembled rather the starting of an apparition from the floor than a transformation wrought by sudden anger.

"Hey—guide us, Mr. Dacre," cried Gillespie, extending his arm and hand with a soothing gesture; "ye wouldn't, sure. Why, —douce Mr. Larkin—ye would na be for gieing douce Jos. Larkin, a craiga-thraw. Hout, mon, he never meant the least offence, sir, tisn't in him. What don't ye speak for yoursel, Mr. Larkin? Tell him, Levi, will ye?"

Mr. Levi, so far from taking any trouble to smooth matters, seemed to think it a very pretty quarrel as it stood, and evidently en-

joyed it more than a dog or cock fight, and was grinning and glowering at the group with undisguised interest and entertainment, from the mist of his tobacco smoke.

"Allow me one moment," said Mr. Larkin, persuasively. "I'm most unfortunate; and I beg to assure you——"

"That will do—that's enough," interrupted Mr. Dacre; "only don't do it again; you had *better* not."

Mr. Larkin threw himself back, with his arm over the back of his chair and his head thrown back, so that he looked mildly on the ceiling, and closed his eyes; for being a proud man, Mr. Larkin did not choose to admit himself frightened, and chose rather to appear patient and as much amused as a religious attorney ought to be.

"And now we are all comfortable again, Mr. Dacre. Ye'll drink a dram in friendship wi' Mr. Larkin?" suggested Gillespie.

"No," said Dacre, recovering; "no; I'll drink no drams, but I'll give you, gentlemen, another toast. I give you Mr. Larkin. Mr. Larkin in the management of my estates—I

don't know a rogue in England I'd prefer. You shall have the management of them, Mr. Larkin; and you shall drink your own health, sir, or it's all off. Gillespie, put a glass of brandy in his tumbler, and fill it up with punch."

"But, sir," remonstrated Mr. Larkin, "I should be ill."

"Drunk, sir—drunk, you mean—and who the devil cares whether you are drunk or sober?"

"I don't say drunk, Mr. Dacre—there—there—pray don't, pray don't, Mr. Dacre—but if I were knocked up to-morrow. I have business, sir, as well as a position, I hope," he said grandly.

"All I say is this," interrupted Dacre, "if you don't drink my toast—a bumper, sir—you don't manage my estate; one guinea richer for me you never shall be, if I can prevent it."

"Hout, Mr. Larkin, what for do you fash yourself, and make such a fuss about your drap punch, and anger our gude friend, Mr. Dacre, for naething?" exclaimed Mr.

Gillespie, thrusting the tumbler into Mr. Larkin's very reluctant hand.

Mr. Levi, who, I'm afraid, was a little malicious, enjoyed his friend Mr. Larkin's perplexity.

"Well, sir, if I do this, I really must not be expected——"

"You'll not be expected to walk. Oh, no, we'll drive you home in a hansham," interposed Mr. Levi.

"I say, I mean, it must end here—it really must," expostulated Mr. Larkin, with as much dignity as he could rally.

So that toast, also, was drunk with all the honours.

"And ye say in a week, maybe, or ten days at maist?" said Mr. Gillespie, grinning, while his harsh red face looked redder in contrast with his white bristles.

"Yes, in a week, maybe, or ten days at maist," repeated Dacre, with a very angry glance. "I—you—didn't I tell you so before?"

"Troth, sirs, this affair we must all admit is no that ill managed," said Gil-

lespie; "a delicate matter, sirs, and deevilish weel managed. Mr. Goldshed will say so, and what say you, Mr. Levi—the best cast ye've made this mony a day. Eh?"

"A long way, shirs, by a long chalk, Mr. Gillespie," said Mr. Levi, gravely shaking his black ringlets; "and I think it's only due to Mr. Dacre, we should drink his health, shir, like the rest, with all the honours, Mr. Gillespie."

"What for no," thundered Gillespie, "I gi' ye the health of our esteemed friend, Mr. Dacre. Mix yer brandy and water, will ye, ye neer-do-weel, Levi, and come, Mr. Larkin, where's yer tumbler? ay, we have it; come now, lad, we'll fit ye in a minute."

Mr. Larkin rosier than he was, perhaps, ever seen before, shook his head solemnly, and raised his large hands, also, in silence.

"And double-shotted," added Levi.

"Double-shotted," echoed the white-headed Scot. "What for no," and he half-filled Mr. Larkin's tumbler with whisky, and completed the bumper with punch.

But Mr. Larkin waved it back with a dignified abhorrence; in his present state he seemed to draw more upon gesture than language, and certainly was very red and pompous.

"Hout, fie, hout, fie, Mr. Larkin, ye'll not refuse, mon," cried Gillespie.

"Disagree, sir," murmured Larkin, loftily and thickly.

"Nonsense, mon, are ye daft?" whispered Gillespie, energetically, "drink your drap punch, sir, and don't anger the gentleman; ye'll no refuse, sir; why, mon, 'twad be the ruin 'o ye."

"And shleep here," said Levi, "theresh a nishe four-poshter in the front parlour; there he goesh all right."

"Vey unfair, sir, no' right, very wrong, I say," murmured Mr. Larkin, reproachfully.

"Now for it," cried Gillespie.

"Mind, gentlemen, I protest, and I'll—I'll shleep here, I think," said Mr. Larkin with a melancholy shake of his head, and he drank his tumbler of punch slowly, while

Gillespie was making his speech, and he looked still redder and more solemn, and nothing would induce him to utter another word.

"He's afraid—lest he should forget himself and say a something true, the beast!"

So shouted Dacre, and with a savage laugh he ran downstairs and got into his brougham, and when the door was shut he buried his face in his hands.

"This is the last profanation. Oh, Laura, darling, forgive, forgive, forgive."

That night was a great scandal, I'm sorry to say, at the hotel of the unexceptionable Josiah Howard Larkin, Esq., of the Lodge, Brandon Park, Gylingdon, who was dropped at its door by a little Jew calling himself "the Rev. Tobiashe Philpott," who stated that he had stumbled upon him while lying in a state of insensibility, near the Black Jack tavern, in Milk Lane, in company with a Roman Catholic clergyman, and a billiard-marker, all suffering from overpowering indisposition. When the admirable gentleman was carried in by "boots" and the

cabman, and placed upon a bench in the hall, his chin upon his breast, he smiled, murmuring indistinctly, "blesh ye, my friendsh, and r'memb'r I'm poorle—poorly, shir, vey poorle—wheresh th' pillow?"

This kind of babble, and a powerful fragrance of punch, aided the diagnosis of "boots," who, with the waiter, got him, faintly resisting, to his bed; and Mr. Larkin in the morning was more formal and reserved with the people of the inn than usual, and received a Wesleyan deputation on the subject of a chapel at Gylingdon, with a severe headache.

CHAPTER XIV.

DE BEAUMIRAIL SEES VISITORS.

DE BEAUMIRAIL the prisoner was ill next morning, but the malady of this scamp was, as beseemed it, very different from that of the serious attorney, who was bullied into an indiscretion, and received a Methodist deputation about the same hour, with a stupid punch head-ache throbbing in his temples.

De Beaumirail was moping about his room pale, dejected, and with a hectic in his cheek that made his eyes look strangely bright.

He saw his insolvent doctor dawdling about the court, and tapped a summons on the pane of glass with his pencil-case, and beckoned him to come up. With a lazy

smile the doctor waved a salutation, and sauntered upstairs.

"You wont believe me," said the doctor, "but you're as full of hysteria as a school-girl, and you have a touch of that nasty sinking that so many poor devils get from being shut up too long in one place."

"I don't know how it is, doctor, but I do think there is something quite wrong here, in my heart I think."

"Pooh," said the doctor, "your heart, indeed."

And he popped his ear to De Beaumirail's waistcoat, and listened for a while.

"No, sir, sound as a bell," said he, "but you oughtn't to be drinking that cursed tea in the morning, lowering the action of the heart, and working your nerves into hysteria. I can't get you to see that a regimen that would do you no harm if you were knocking about the world, wont answer here, sir, especially after five or six years' incarceration. By Jove, sir, I've had to come under rule myself, a little gin-and-water, sir, I take, and I assure you the

effect a glass or two produces is quite ridiculous, sir; there's no one feels for us, what's everybody's business, sir, is nobody's business, and so, sir, we are left here to rot under this murderous system and put to a slow—that's her, the new woman, is it? in the window—third from the corner—old woman, the Dowager Lady Flammock, poor old devil!—put to a slow torture, sir, and killed by inches, for the crime of being poor!"

"A disgusting crime it is, doctor, we must admit," said De Beaumirail, with a shrug.

"It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest, sir," said the doctor; "rich people enough, sir, to speak ill of us, without *our* joining."

"Doctor," said he, "you're a good-natured fellow, but I think there's something wrong; you fellows were never known yet to tell a man when there was anything amiss with his heart."

"Well, it's a nervous heart, and a weak heart, sir, that's all—and that's the reason

I'm always telling you to give up tea and cigars."

"You are a good-natured fellow, very good-natured, doctor. But upon my honour, you need not fancy you'd frighten me; there's nothing now within the circle of possibilities so welcome as death."

"There again, that's the way, sir, you depress your spirits, and if your spirits go down, the system goes down; it's only one thing of course, but still it's something," said the doctor.

"May I live a year?" asked De Beaumirail.

"Nonsense," said the doctor.

"Two?"

"Yes, three; you may live *thirty* years, sir, if you'll only be advised; you have just a nervous heart, don't you see; and if you persist in illtreating it, why it may resent it, and organic disease, *might* result."

"Three years. Well, doctor, three years is a long day."

"And thirty is longer," said the doctor; "will you come out and take a little stroll

up and down? There's sun on the other side of the court—summer, sir, beautiful."

"Thanks, no; I expect a friend here every moment."

"Well, my dear sir, you're not to let your spirits down, mind; and there's Mark Wagget looking for me. I'll run down, and you know where to find me, not a hundred miles from Farringdon-street, if you should happen to want me."

And with this joke, which did service pretty often, the doctor went downstairs whistling, and stumbled into the court, where he hailed his friend; and they strolled and shuffled about together, and seemed to have no lack of lazy banter, till Mark growing serious, pulled a coffee-stained *Times* out of his great-coat pocket. A great-coat with a hole in the elbow, was oddly enough, a garment which Mark had worn all that unusually hot summer—and the two luminaries under a bushel, put their heads together over an essay which affected them in their public capacity as prisoners in the Fleet, and nodded and talked over it earnestly.

De Beaumirail, in a blank state of mind, watching the consultation of these worthies, as he leaned against his window-shutter, was recalled to other things, by a knock at his door, and his gentle friend, good Mr. Parker, came in.

"My kind and good friend," said De Beaumirail, taking the old man's hand in both his own. "I can only say how infinitely obliged I am. Your letter reached me half an hour ago; you have done all I wished; you will understand hereafter how good a work you've aided. But, for *me* nothing good can ever come. Some few vain agitations, sir; I've always been sanguine, hope has been my intoxication, and I have drunk deep enough of the cup of madness. I shall taste it no more: a crisis with me is at hand, sir; the somnambulist you have known so long, is waked at last, and finds himself on the angle of a precipice from which there is no descent but to be dashed to pieces. Fancy three vultures, sir, and an eagle in the air employed to strike down quarry for them—it is a mon-

strous dream—all false but their cadaverous appetites. I'll write to you by-and-by; you'll understand our Christian friend, Larkin, better when I do; and, sir, I believe I shan't live very long; there's something fatal, something has begun, the seed is sown, and the harvest will soon be white for the reaper; perhaps I shan't see you again, sir, till you come to read your good books to me, which then, you know, I shan't have strength to escape from"—he smiled—"but meanwhile you'll write to me; I'll tell you what about—time enough."

He sighed deeply.

"I must have seemed often monstrously ungrateful, Mr. Parker, but it was not I; it was the bitterness and fury of my fate; thrust any man with energies and feelings into the solitude of prison for life, and what do you leave of him but his fiendish nature, with every good that ever qualified it corrupted to poison, or extinguished; but I believe, even devils can be grateful; 'grateful to you I know I was; but, then, you were my one friend. The

last gleam of heaven that kept human sympathy alive within me, entered my door when you opened it, and I cling to your affection, as to a spar in shipwreck; and for the present—perhaps, sir, for ever—farewell."

And so saying, De Beaumirail, in the foreign fashion, embraced his visitor.

CHAPTER XV.

TWICE GOOD-NIGHT.

THAT night, at his usual hour, Dacre arrived in the highest imaginable spirits at Guildford House.

"What a charming old house this is, there is something in it so *riant* and genial. Spirits of hope and gaiety haunt its passages, one runs up its stairs without touching them, as a lark flutters upwards to heaven, one crosses the floor to the measure of a dance, and its very walls seem humming to the vibrations of old music; and, pray, forgive me, I'm talking such nonsense, trying to keep pace with my happiness, which quite outstrips my reason."

"Better to fall in love with our clumsy old house than to quarrel with the poor old thing, as some people do," said Laura Gray,

"there's Lady Ardenbroke,
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"She's not content with
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"Not quite a misnomer,
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"there's Lady Ardenbroke, who can't afford it a civil word."

"She's not content with calling it a nunnery, I assure you," interposed Mrs. Wardell; "she says it's a madhouse."

"Not quite a misnomer, while I am in it," laughed Dacre. "Sometimes, at least —to night, for instance—I am very mad; but very happy."

"And if one is to go mad there is no cause preferable, but it is not common; one does not meet many people who are suffering from too much happiness," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Madness is sometimes, I believe, hilarious enough, but is not brought on by overmuch joy; there is a reaction from misery, and even *in* misery that simulates gaiety. Heaven help us," said he, "a gaiety of nature in her irony—cynical as it subsides, insane as it rises. I think if I could have gaiety no otherwise, I should thank anyone for a flagon of laughing gas; dying wretches in the hospitals are heard to laugh in their dreams; but Mrs. Wardell's voice has waked

me from mine." He sighed, and laughed, and sighed again.

"Sorry to hear it if it makes you less happy. If I thought I were making you dull here," said Mrs. Wardell, with an influx of dignity, "I should keep my remarks a good deal more to myself."

"How stupid of me to convey myself so ill," said Dacre, "I spoke only of those mad dreams which lead sleep-walkers to death. There are dreams of paradise—the most unreal, perhaps, of all; and from them no voice but one can recall us."

"Ain't we getting into the clouds, Mr. Dacre?" said Laura Gray. "I sometimes suspect you of having picked up some of Don Quixote's library in your travels."

"And read them to the same purpose?"

"No, for you seem a little conscious of your craze," said Challys.

"That's my misfortune;—than want of faith in one's insanity—what is there more miserable?" answered he.

"That depends, of course, on the nature of one's delusion," said she, "and now I'll talk

no more nonsense, and by-and-by you'll sing us a song."

"Always command me," said he, lowering his voice as he came near her; "have I ever yet disobeyed you?"

"You have not always kept your promise," she answered.

"In what have I ever broken it to you?"

"In this very matter of music," she answered. "There have been evenings here, when I asked you to sing, when you promised to sing, and yet when you went away without singing."

"And if I did, you know, Miss Gray, it was some mischance, never from want of ardour in your service. You won't say that, Miss Gray, but believe, although I've never done you any service, yet I'd lay down my life for you—as, for you, I am laying down my last hope."

Laura Gray answered only by a steadfast and melancholy look, in which her beautiful eyes met his, and after a moment were lowered to the ground.

"And in whatever I promise to you, Miss

Gray, or in your behalf, I will die rather than fail, and you will see how hard a trial I will yet endure for you. And now to begin, I'll sing, and *redeem* my promise."

The last words he spoke with a strange ardour full of a wild reproach.

A pretty Italian song. I don't know whether it has a place in any opera; I only know that it is one of my earliest acquaintances in that sort of melody—full of passion, melancholy and self-devotion. He sang—

"Giuro che ad altra mai
La destra io porgero—
Che a quei vezzosi rai
Sempre fidel saro.
Se del averso fato
Vittima al fin' cadro.
Col suo bell' nome amato
Fra i labri io morero."

Well did Challys Gray, as she sat by the window listening, know to what divinity the thrilling adoration of that passionate tenor was addressed. Never had she heard that voice so divinely melancholy and rapturous before—never perhaps before had it so moved her.

It ceased—there was silence—ever so little

more, and she could not have restrained her tears—and then reserve and prudence farewell—where might she not have found herself?—the reserves and liberty of proud Challys Gray—all lost in a moment. On what hysterical uncertainties sometimes hang life-long destinies, and even the courses of eternity.

In her silence was that trembling, when the breath is held, and the heart swells, and the eyes are filling. For worlds she would not have let him see how she was moved. Could she trust that half-deposed caution which her impulsive heart almost despised, and what pledges might not such a moment have given and taken, and so imperious, haughty Challys Gray would have promised herself away, without one of her difficulties answered, or a single mystery cleared up.

"Shall I sing it again?" he asked in a low tone, after an interval.

"No," said Challys Gray.

"You don't like it?"

"No, that is, I don't care about it."

"Really, Challys, you might be a little

less, I had almost said *rude*, but certainly you are not very grateful, considering how beautifully it was sung," interposed Mrs. Wardell.

"No, I don't like it," repeated Challys impetuously. "I don't mean, of course, that Mr. Dacre did not sing it well; but I don't like the song, and that's the reason I say so when I'm asked. Will you sing something else, Mr. Dacre?"

"What shall it be?" asked he.

"Nothing sentimental—I mean in that strain. You sang some very pretty English ballads for us one night," she replied.

So he sang one of those which had pleased her.

"I may be wrong, Mr. Dacre, but I don't think, somehow, our music is *quite* so good as usual," said Challys Gray; "you wont mind my saying so; I don't know how it is—perhaps it is my fault—people are sometimes out of voice, and as often out of ear, I think. But it is not *that*," she said cruelly, "you are not singing well to-night, and I don't care to hear it. It is a vulgar

taste I am sure, but I think I should like a foolish comic song this evening better than all the love-lorn ditties we could pick out of the whole circle of the Italian operas. I know you have not any, I'm only saying what a Vandal I am, but I daresay the Vandals had very good sense."

I don't know what thought may have prompted this sudden petulance. But Laura Gray's mind was in an odd state; all this time there was a great pain at her heart; she was angry, she did not well know at what, or with whom.

Dacre walked slowly over to the window.

"I'm very sorry—I'm mortified—that I should have acquitted myself so indifferently."

She made him no answer.

"But my singing, for a while, is over."

"How do you mean?"

"I can't come to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after. I can't see you again for some time—a short time, I hope—but I must deny myself—and—may I write?—I'll write, if you allow me, a very full letter."

Challys Gray looked very pale.

"And, pray, who imposes this absence upon you?" she asked a little haughtily, "and how can it interest us more than your other friends?"

They were talking low, and she glanced towards Julia Wardell, but that lady was deep in her novel.

"It is imposed upon me, Miss Gray, and it pains me to think I shan't be missed here, for except you, I have scarcely on earth another friend."

"You had no business, sir," said imperious little Challys Gray, "to decide on any such thing without first consulting your friends."

This, it must be allowed, was a very inconsistent speech.

"My friends, as a rule, seem to care so little what becomes of me, that my consulting them would have been a very great presumption," said Alfred Dacre a little bitterly.

"Perhaps it would, or very likely you *have* consulted them. It is very imper-

tinent of me to talk about it; your time and plans are, of course, your own, and I don't *desire* to be one of those people who engage in the thankless office of advising others, and I shan't, though, indeed, I have not been asked; and if it is not very rude, is it not very near your usual hour of leaving us?"

Dacre smiled reproachfully.

"The hour to which you usually permitted my stay has not not quite arrived," he said, gently, "but even were it less clear that the time when I *ought* to go has come, I should have had to take my leave. I *must* go earlier than usual this evening. I need not say how much more painful than I expected my departure has become."

"You seem to wish to go, Mr. Dacre, and there is no reason why you should not be gone this moment. Pray do go."

"You are displeased with me, Miss Gray."

"Displeased, sir! you talk to me as if I had a right to be pleased or displeased with you in matters that concern yourself only. I don't know what you mean."

"May I write to you, Miss Gray?"

"No, Mr. Dacre; there's no occasion to write."

"Do you really refuse me that very humble privilege?"

"It is better not, Mr. Dacre. I mean, it would only be a trouble, and I don't wish it," she said, imperiously.

He looked at her beautiful and spirited face, darkly and sadly.

"From this hour, Challys, my sorrow dates."

"You can't blame us," said Challys Gray, haughtily; "and—and—Mr. Dacre, pray don't run a risk of being late for your business."

"May I write?" he pleaded.

"I've said already, I prefer your not writing—I don't choose it—it shan't be, Mr. Dacre."

"I think you are very cruel. I ought to have known it; but I have quite made up my mind."

He stood leaning at the window, and looked out; a shadow of care had overcast

him, and it seemed to her, under that gloom, that his face was growing like that of Leonora's phantom trooper, paler, and thinner, and sterner, from minute to minute.

"Made up your mind, Mr. Dacre! To what?"

"To disobey you."

"To write, you mean?"

"Yes—for one thing, I'll write."

"Does not it strike you, sir, that nothing can be more insolent? And I'll tell you what I shall do—for I've made up my mind, also—if you should presume to do so, the moment I see from whom it comes I'll burn it unread."

With these words she rose, and walked quickly out of the room.

Julia Wardell had dropped into one of her naps. Dacre had forgot her presence. His face was pale and resolute, and his eyes gleamed with the light of excitement, as he took a last look down the avenue in which stood his carriage. There was a little moonlight this night. He looked at his watch, and then he drew a paper from the pocket

in the breast of his coat. He opened it, and, having read a few words, replaced it.

Then he suddenly recollected worthy Julia Wardell.

Seeing that she was asleep, he stole lightly across the floor, and let himself softly out of the room.

He had hardly entered the lobby when Laura Gray ran down the stairs. She looked sad and gentle.

"Mr. Dacre, I'm so glad—you wont remember what I said to-night—and you'll write to me—wont you?—and I was very cross—but I was vexed—and I could not part without saying this—and we are quite good friends again?—ain't we?"

"And I'm forgiven?—and I'll write and —explain everything; and then you'll see how inevitable was the reserve of which you complained—and I think—you'll pity me."

"Good night," she said.

He pressed the hand she gave him to his lips, and, hastily drawing it away, she repeated, "Good night," and ran up the stairs. He looked after her, in silence; and

then he turned, and went down to the hall.

Challys Gray had placed herself at the lobby window above that near which their parting had been. She was waiting to see him come down the steps, and to see the last of him, as he passed down the avenue.

She waited there minute after minute, for a long time, in this expectation. But Mr. Dacre did not emerge from the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH MR. DACRE FAINTS.

On arriving at the foot of the stairs at Guildford House, you find yourself looking toward the hall-door, at the entrance of a spacious hall. There is a back hall, considerably smaller than this, visible under an arch, and with a second door, opening upon a terrace, which exactly faces the hall-door.

When Dacre had reached the foot of the stairs there was no one in the hall. He walked a few steps cautiously into it. From the pocket of his great coat he took one of those instruments which were then known as "night-protectors," formed of a strong piece of whalebone, with a nob of lead at each end, and all whipped over with catgut, like the handle of a riding-whip. The great coat he left where it hung, and took merely

his wide-awake hat. Then he stood still for a moment, and looked toward the terrace-entrance with a sharp glance, listening intently. There was neither sight nor sound to alarm him.

In a moment more he had opened and closed the door, and jumping from the terrace to the lower level of the grass, he listened again, under shelter of the overhanging balustrade.

It was a pause only of a second. With swift steps he reached the stable-door. It opened with a latch.

"Anyone here?" he asked, as he entered.

There was no answer. He passed through and found himself in a paved stable-yard. Here he repeated his question again without an answer.

The door opening upon the stable lane was fast, but the key was in the lock. Again Dacre looked at his watch. The momentous hour had just arrived. There was exactly time to reach the point of safety, if all went smoothly.

Stern and sharp were the features of the

young man as he looked up and down the carriage-way leading from the stables.

This was a much wider road than Brompton lanes, especially stable-lanes, were wont to be, and had been laid out probably at first for a line of dwelling-houses, and a lordly row of old elm trees rose dimly into the moonlight from the other side, and the buildings that abutted on it at the side on which he stood were old-fashioned gateways or gables of stable-buildings, some of which were overgrown with ivy.

Not a human being was moving on this pretty and melancholy old road, and not a sound audible but the baying of a watch-dog, and the faint clink of his own steps.

He knew the geography of this road perfectly; in fact, he had studied it as a general does the scene of his operations. About two hundred steps higher up, it opened upon a road parallel to the great Brompton highway.

If he could reach that corner unobserved, five minutes more would bring him to a cab-stand, and then one long straight pull of

half an hour or less, and if money could make "the mare go," the cab and its freightage would be at the right minute at its destination.

Under the shadow of the buildings, with a light and quick tread, he walked. He had not gone fifty yards, however, when a a whistle from the road behind him, and answered from the point to which he was tending, pierced him with a chill misgiving.

In a situation so intensely critical, the bravest man is liable to unacknowledged tremors, such as in ascertained and open danger on the field would never approach him. He might as well be shot as delayed. All depended on two hundred steps.

Looking over his shoulder he saw two figures approaching from the lower end of the road, and before him were also two—one some little way in advance of the other.

His heart swelled and fluttered for an instant, and then came the cold intense resolution of an adventurous man who is in for a crisis of danger. He saw that these persons were approaching at a rapid pace

from either end, and would surround him by the time they had reached the centre.

This manœuvre, at all events, should not succeed. He seized the Napoleonic plan of taking the enemy in detail, and with his loaded whalebone in his grasp dashed onward to meet the foremost of his adversaries. He ran at the top of his speed; the enemy hesitated; with his left hand he flourished a ribbon of paper, in the other he grasped a thick bludgeon, and cried—

"You know me well, sir, there's no use—you're had."

But Mr. Dacre's onset was not to be so stayed. There was not a moment to spare, for the other fellow was running up, and Alfred Dacre had closed and struck before he was on the field. It was well, perhaps, for both parties that the man ducked at the moment that his blow descended. It struck off his hat, with no further damage, and our young friend, who, with all his foreign refinement, showed the skill of an English boxer, before the man had quite recovered his equilibrium, struck him a tremendous

blow with his fist between the eyes, and down went his foremost foe with a stunning pound upon the road.

The "reserve," who witnessed this disaster, now not three yards in his van, pulled down his hat, halted, and whirled his stick in the air. At him sprang our hero, but before he reached came a sound like a bat on the cricket-ball, and our handsome friend, stricken from behind, fell upon his shoulder, and rolled round upon his back, white and ghastly in the moonlight, and with a gush of blood trickling in a divided rivulet over his forehead and face.

Our handsome tenor lay there, in dreamland, or, for aught they knew, dead. No trace of sternness in his face; sad and gentle as a sick child's sleep were the features on which the moon now shone, and his long silken lashes showed very prettily on the death-like cheek below his closed eyes.

Laura Challys Gray was in her drawing-room, hardly two hundred steps away. What would she have thought of this tableau?

"Well, 'twas him took to that work first," said the man with whom he had been on the point of closing. "He'd spar—that ere chap; that *was* a teazer he lent Jim. All right again, Jim?"

This polite inquiry from his brother beak did not elicit a reply from Jim, whose temper seemed to be a little soured.

"I shay, Jim, run you round and fetch the brougham. This here gent's got it rather 'eavy, and we'll want to give him a hairing to-*wards* the city; or if you'd raythér, Tom can go—a bit queerish, I desshay?" said Mr. Levi.

"What's this? *I shay!* develish well he didn't give you a fillip with this ere feather," continued the Jew, taking up the weapon that lay on the ground beside Dacre's head, and jerking it lightly in the air. "Mind, Tom, where we found it. If anything goesh wrong with this queer fellow it will show the people what a lamb he vas."

Then stooping over Mr. Dacre, the Jew insinuated his long fingers into his breast-

pocket, and drew out thence a paper, which, touching the blood on his cheek and forehead, as Mr. Levi plucked it forth, required to be shaken in the air, and opened gingerly to save that nice gentleman from dabbling his fingers.

Over this paper the Jew sneered, and grinned, and snorted. It was the passport of Guy De Beaumirail to Paris.

"I wish you a very pleasant trip, Mr. De Beaumirail; but you'll want a bit of bazhilicon for your poor head first; a very pleasant journey; you do look a deal too lively for London. Paris is the ground for you; but it's hard to tear yourshelf away from the sheenes of sho many agreeable years, and you'll put it off for a day or two, wont you, and jusht shleep another night or two in the jolly old Fleet?"

Just at this moment the young man sat up and looked before him with a dazed wild stare, and said hurriedly—

"Where is he?"

"Who'sh he?" inquired Mr. Levi.

"The stick!—the—why—oh! it's all

right—where—that's you Levi—am I hit? By Jove—ha! ha! ha! I'm bleeding a bit. I—I say it's all fair; have you a little water?"

"We'll get it on the way *home*," sneered the Jew, with a long-drawn drawl on the emphatic word. "Buckets o' wa-ter. Great pity you're not on your way to Paris *viâ* Havre—ain't it?"

"All fair, sir; I don't complain—the fortune of war," said the wounded knight, with a feeble laugh. "A little trick—mine and countermine. Was it you who shot me, Mr. Levi?"

"The bullet that shot you is made of oak—a tap of Tom Burster's switch."

"Well—I don't grumble; and—and here's the carriage—quite fair; but—I'm a little thirsty. A fellow might have a glass of water, don't you think? Very quickly done, sir—ha! ha! ha!" and the laugh trembled into a groan, and the young gentleman fainted—I suppose from loss of blood.

Levi was beginning to grow a little uncomfortable. It would have been decidedly

awkward if the prisoner had died of his wound, in their hands.

After a little time he recovered consciousness, and this time got some water to drink, and said—

"Well, as I can't go to Paris this time, I suppose I had better return to my castle. Tell them, in heaven's name, to drive quick, and get it over soon."

So they got him in, and escorting him in a body, drove rapidly toward the famous prison in Farringdon-street.

De Beaumirail said nothing till he reached the well-known door.

"Well, here's the cage, and my wings pretty well clipt."

So, he got out, and wiped his face with his handkerchief, and a faint groan escaped him. But his spirit was not subdued. He held himself erect and smiling, and staggered through the hatch and the corridor, and even whistled an air as he went up stairs; and on getting into his room, he fainted again.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON AGAIN.

No news, of course, of Dacre next day at Guildford House. None was to have been looked for; and yet Laura Gray was restless, and looking out from the windows, and could not be still for a moment.

To Mrs. Wardell she had never disclosed her secret. That kind old soul thought her, indeed, often rather hard upon Dacre, and took up the cudgels for him, never suspecting.

"Where is he?—what can it be?—could not he have written just a line?—I told him to write;—I think, whatever it is, he might have managed one line."

All that time De Beaumirail, whom we know better as Alfred Dacre, was feverish

Still, the perspective was not quite void. There was one last object—and something to interest—at least for a time. A day or two after, De Beaumirail, still very pale, had thrown himself on his sofa, and was expecting, by his own appointment, a visit from the persons who had foiled his escape, and were, probably, in no pleasant temper, as respected him.

These three gentlemen entered his room in silence, and with countenances, after their varieties, more or less threatening. Mr. Gillespie and Mr. Levi, uninvited, pulled chairs to the table, and grimly sat down. Mr. Larkin, who, whatever he might think of M. de Beaumirail, could never forget that he was himself a Christian gentleman, was the only one of the three visitors who saluted him—and a very dignified and withering bow it was.

"All in the dumps, gentlemen—myself included. Let's see if we can't make ourselves a little more cheerful before we separate."

"Gammon," said Mr. Levi, under his breath, with a rather furious gleam in his sullen eyes.

"We're not likely to be over cheerful, I thank ye, Mr. Beaumirail; I never was mair disgusted, sir, in a' my life."

"We conceived, sir," said Mr. Larkin, "that dealing as gentlemen, there was a confidence on which we might mutually rely. Every gentleman is aware of the kind of feeling—of course there's something higher, I hope, than any mere wordly code—but that is not for every one. I did, however, implicitly rely upon that delicacy—that—a—a—delicacy——"

"Well, you see it was not one of the delicacies of the season, as the Lord Mayor says," interposed De Beaumirail.

"A delicacy which is implied in the term honour, Mr. de Beaumirail—*honour*—sir," repeated Mr. Larkin, with a melancholy severity.

"Honour among thieves—I know—and I don't dispute it—I've behaved very ill, but I'll make amends."

The gentlemen all looked at him fixedly.

"I've come off second best—I don't complain; we were playing a sharp and hard game. It wasn't ill played at either side, and I lost, that's all," said De Beaumirail.

Mr. Levi sneered sullenly.

"Yes, I've got a rap over the head, and I forgive you."

"We advanshed you money, Mr. Beaumirail," said Levi, reproachfully.

"I'm willing to return you everything you gave me, punctually, even that knock over the head, if you like it," said De Beaumirail.

"Chaff, d—— chaff, when business is on," said Mr. Levi. "And we bought up them debts with *thoushands* of capital, sir, shpeculating on that marriage, and only I got a hint of your minewvers you'd'a carried your pint and mizzled!" and Mr. Levi clenched this energetic speech with an oath.

"Why this business is worth to you

gentlemen, how much? and to me, at least, the same, and *liberty*. I think *there's* some guarantee for sincerity. Come, gentlemen, I'm your most obedient humble servant once again."

"And what did you mean by that deevil's trick, sir?" demanded Mr. Gillespie.

"Suppose I meant to try whether I couldn't have it all to myself. Wolves, sir—all wolves—we're a greedy little pack, gentlemen; but I've got a lesson."

"You'd like to be on again, is that it?" asked Mr. Levi.

"On again! Of course I would—in fact, I must—and so must you. You can't afford to lose all that money. I can't afford to lose all I'm to gain, along with my liberty and my life—I'm talking coarsely to you, gentlemen, to make myself intelligible—you wish it as much as I. I hate the routine affectation of indifference—it always delays, and sometimes loses a bargain."

"If it's ever on again—which I'm doubtful—for myself and guv'nor—we'll

want to be sharp and wide-awake," said Mr. Levi.

"I confess, gentlemen, I have a very unpleasant feeling about this business. I shall, if you wish it, consider the subject;—but I don't conceal from myself the extremely painful character of the recent occurrence, and I am bound, in frankness to all parties, to say, that my present feeling is to consider the matter as at an end, to act upon my detainers strictly, and to direct my attention to bringing to light, and, of course, into court, the foreign property of the gentleman with whom I have had the honour, for a time, to act, and which, I have some reason to think, is, by no means so inaccessible or inconsiderable as it was represented to us."

"You'll not object, Mr. Larkin, to come into the next room, and talk a bit wi' me and Mr. Levi."

So spoke Mr. Gillespie; and, taking Mr. Larkin's assent pretty much for granted, he led the way into M. de Beaumirail's bedroom; and, without ceremony, his com-

panions followed him, leaving De Beaumirail, perfectly indifferent about that impertinence, and lost in a profound reverie.

"I won't allow myself to hope;—no, there's no hope; and poor old Parker will have nothing to tell me—nothing."

He sighed profoundly, and walked to the window, for he expected a visit from his old friend, and stood gazing anxiously into the yard.

While he thus waited a knock came to his door, and a letter. It was from old Mr. Parker, and said—

"As I shall be unable to call at your rooms to-day, and knowing that you will naturally be impatient to learn the result of my visit to Guildford House, I write to say that I saw Miss Gray to-day, and strictly regulated what I said upon your wishes, but quite unsuccessfully — the absolute secrecy as to your identity, which you imposed upon me, I, of course, observed. I confined myself to ascertaining whether her feelings with respect to Mr. de Beaumirail had undergone any favourable change,

whether she would enter on a discussion of his character and conduct, and whether any persuasion would induce her to tolerate an interview, however short, with him. I was not left many minutes in doubt upon any one of these points. No good can possibly come of any attempt to lead her into an interview. In her present temper nothing could be more painful and fruitless. I humbly pray the Almighty that He will be pleased to dispose her heart more charitably, and so in His own good time He may—at present it would be vain and even mischievous to press it."

And so with regrets and condolences the kind old man closed his letter.

"I am not disappointed—blessed are they who expect nothing—not the least."

But his face looked paler and sharper, and he sighed again from his troubled heart.

"All's over, *quite*."

And he walked to the chimneypiece, as if in search of something there, and a pale, patient smile, gleamed on his face, and he

repeated "quite;" and he wandered away to his mahogany bookcase, and there he read the backs of the books without remembering what he read, every now and then repeating gently, "quite;" and he heard the voices of his three visitors, whom he had forgotten, babbling inside, and waking up, he cursed them intensely under his breath.

"Three long heads in there; it will be some comfort to knock them together, as *I* shall; yes, *you* may *lay* them together, gentlemen, but I'll knock them together, with a clink that will leave a headache behind it for sometime to come. That little Jew that looks as if he'd poison his mother for three half-crowns; and that conceited, stony-hearted, Scotch skin-flint, Gillespie—and Larkin! I hold my peace at Larkin; no one but Satan could describe Mr. Larkin.

"To think of me here! And the mean dogs that are everywhere prosperous, and I, punished so inexorably for a few boyish follies!—fortune—health—liberty—the only good hope that ever approached me—all

taken in cold blood; and I without a friend I may say, compelled to associate with such indescribable beasts!"

De Beaumirail ground his teeth with actual fury, and with one enraged spurn of his heel dashed in the door with a noise that made them jump.

"On or off—are you tongue-tied—delay twenty seconds longer, and *I* declare off, and, by Heaven, *nothing* shall move me after."

Mr. Levi, who was of an excitable temperament, had jumped from his seat, and was standing with his fists clenched as the door flew open. Mr. Larkin cowering in his chair, was staring at the same object, with a flushed frown on his forehead, in the sudden conviction that De Beaumirail had shot himself with a pistol.

"Canny, there lad, canny," bawled Mr. Gillespie, whose nerves were also ajar.

"Come, gentlemen, these are my rooms, if you please, and I choose to be alone," said De Beaumirail, who was growing palpably dangerous.

Mr. Larkin rose with a lofty carelessness, and with a slight waive of his large hand towards Mr. Gillespie, he said grandly—

"You can state my views, Mr. Gillespie. I leave myself as to our joint answer to Mr. de Beaumirail, unhesitatingly in your hands, sir;" and so Mr. Larkin, who had an objection to a *fracas* (which he called a fraycass), got out of the room with rather a brighter colour, and as grandly as he could.

"Well, Mr. Beaumirail," said Gillespie, putting on his white felt hat, and taking his worsted gloves and stick, "we're amost decided, for once more, to trust you, sir—that is," he added cautiously, "about as far as I'd throw a bull by the tail, Mr. Beaumirail, ha, ha, ha. I mean, sir, we'll tak more care, sir, we'll tak more care, sir, and sleep with one eye open, ye ken; we must bring down half a dozen of our people, mind ye, every time you go down to that place at Brompton; you oblige us, ye see, to be sharp, sir, and that will cost us a handsome penny, but we'll mak trial o't for a couple of times more, jest—and—that's all."

"*Once* more is enough," said De Beaumirail sharply.

"Well, well, Mr. Beaumirail, that's bringin' matters to a point," said Mr. Gillespie, in a more conciliatory tone, "ye'r talking sense noo, sir, if ye can stick to it——"

"Time we should wind up, and get shomething out of the fire—a d—d long up-hill game it hash been to me and the guv'nor," said Mr. Levi, who never allowed that anything paid him; and took what fortune gave him, and, as Mr. Gillespie would have said, "kept aye grumblin'."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KNIGHT OF THE SILVER DRAGON APPEARS.

THIS day an unexpected visitor was seen at Guildford House. Charles Mannering, thin and pale, alighted at the door, and Laura, at the window, could scarcely believe her eyes. She flew down stairs and met him in the hall.

"I'm so delighted you've come back from the wars, you poor wounded soldier! we must nurse you, and drive you about wherever you like, and take such care of you. Julia Wardell is the best nurse in the world. Don't come upstairs, it will tire you—you shall come into the library. She'll be back again soon. She went out about an hour ago for a drive, and I'm so glad to see you here again—honest old Charlie."

"Are you really?" he said, smiling in great felicity, as he held her hands in both his; "I'm so much obliged, and so happy, you can't think."

So in he went to the library, and there was a great deal, you may be sure, to be asked and answered, and at last he said—

"By-the-bye, is Mr. Dacre in town?"

To which, looking down for a moment as she did so, she answered, after her wont, quite truly—

"I really don't know."

And looking up suddenly, with flaming cheeks, she asked in turn, with a grave defiance—

"Why do you inquire? Have you heard anything new about him?"

"Well, no," said he, "that is, more properly, yes and no."

"No man ever comes into this house," said Challys Gray impetuously, "but he instantly begins to talk in riddles—riddles ascending through all degrees of perplexity, until they reach the climax, like this of simple absurdity. How *can* any honest

question be truly answered by 'yes and no?'"

"Well, it's plain you give it up," he said, laughing. "So what I mean is this—I have learned nothing more about him distinctly, but I have received a very distinct caution."

"Oh, I know; that was, of course, from Ardenbroke," she said, looking at him with eyes not to be evaded.

"Why should you suppose Ardenbroke?" demanded he.

"Because Ardenbroke wrote a very unaccountable letter about him before," she replied, "in fact, I think a most inexcusable letter—I mean from a person who had described himself as Mr. Dacre's friend. *You*, of course, have your own ideas of friendship; they don't quite agree with ours. We women never run down unoffending people as you do. You may say what you like, but we are not only more generous, but infinitely more just. And what did Ardenbroke say? or is the caution intended for us or for Mr. Dacre's tailor? I think you'll

allow the whole thing does very nearly approach impertinence, not to say outrage."

"Well, recollect I don't say who it is," began Charles Mannering.

"But there's no good in denying; I know it was Ardenbroke; and what did he say?" insisted Challys Gray.

"Well, whoever gave me this warning," he began——

"I'll promise you not to mention the subject to him, if you'll only tell me plainly that it was Ardenbroke. I know it was; and I'll attack him very fiercely, I can tell you, when he comes back, unless you tell me," interrupted Laura.

"If I tell you who it was," said Charles, giving way, "will you promise, quite seriously, not to betray your knowledge to the person who wrote?"

"Yes—I don't mind—certainly—I promise," said Laura.

"Well, on that condition, it *was* Ardenbroke," he answered.

"I knew it was. Didn't I say so half a dozen times?" said Laura; "and now tell

me what he says. Have you got his letter here?"

"No; but I remember everything exactly."

"Well, pray go on."

"He told me to take an opportunity of talking to you. Perhaps if he had known," said Charles, looking down, with a little embarrassment—"I mean if he had thought how very little right I have to speak to you, Challys, on any such subject, he would have chosen some one else; but he has put it upon me so much in the way of a duty that I could hardly evade it."

"If solemnity is a recommendation I think he could hardly have chosen his ambassador better," said Miss Gray.

"Even that is something," said Charles, smiling sadly, "when one's chance of being of use depends on being known to be in earnest."

There was a latent sarcasm in the look which Challys Gray turned upon him, which was cruel.

"In that, perhaps, though in no other

respect, such a messenger as he might have chosen," said Charles, tranquilly.

"If sage advice could make one wise, I should be the wisest girl in England," said Challys Gray.

"I venture no advice, pray remember; it comes all from Ardenbroke. I do not know even the facts on which he seems to found it. I only know the conclusion he presses, and that he is extremely anxious as well as earnest."

"Well, and where is this earnest and anxious gentleman? If he is in London I think he might have saved you the trouble of remembering his lecture, and come here to speak for himself. I don't mean, Charlie," she said, observing something like a pained smile as he looked down, "that you could not say it just as well as he—perhaps better, but a lecture is a lecture, and a bore at best; and I think it is hardly fair to arrange that I should have this one twice over—first from his ambassador, and afterwards from himself—and—I really don't know what to think. There never was a poor creature, I believe, so worried as I am."

Challys Gray was curious, and yet reluctant—she complained of being so addressed, and yet wished intensely to hear the message.

"My dear Laura, don't fancy that I urge you. I thought it was quite the other way; and, unless you command me, one word on the subject I shan't say. In fact, as I said before, I have not the least right, except on these terms, to mention it again."

"Now, you want to provoke me," said Challys Gray; "pray, let there be no more about it, but tell me—I'm sure it is disagreeable—what *has* got into Ardenbroke's head?"

"Well, it is just this—I can only tell you in a very general way, for I am quite in the dark as to his reasons:—He says that he would give a great deal to come up to London, and will, the very moment he has his second consultation about that Scotch property; and he says, in these words, as nearly as I can remember, 'If Challys Gray has any friend near her—and I think you are one—he will not fail to entreat her to

drop the person who calls himself Alfred Dacre. I made a foolish promise which embarrasses me though only a little; but, if I were assured that he was availing himself of my silence to insinuate himself into an intimacy in that house, I should not hesitate a moment about letting Challys know all about him. I hinted a good deal before. It is quite true what I said in his favour. But that is *all* that *can* be said in his favour, and when I said it I had no idea that he dreamed of introducing himself on a footing of intimate acquaintance in my cousin's house.'"

"Upon my word, you seem to remember his periods wonderfully," said Miss Gray, who was vexed and embarrassed. "What a capital actor you would have made."

"A slower study, I'm afraid, than you think, Challys. From the moment his letter reached me, yesterday afternoon, I don't think one of my waking hours has passed without my conning over these sentences."

"Is there any more?" asked Challys.

"Yes; just an earnest request that as he could not well ask his mother, old Lady Ardenbroke——"

"Did he say *why?*"

"He seemed to hint that old ladies talk, and that it would be everywhere."

"Yes, I know; and what more?"

"An earnest entreaty that I would see you; and his expression was to implore of you to quite give up Mr. Dacre's acquaintance, and on no account to permit him to—to write to you."

"Oh! nonsense—*write.* Mr Dacre used, as you saw, just to drop in for an hour or so, and sing a little. What a fuss! and besides, Mr. Dacre has not been here for—I forget how long—and did not Ardenbroke say that all he said of him—in his favour, I mean—was quite true? you said so."

"Yes, he does," said Charles.

"Well, so far as my acquaintance is likely to go, that is quite enough. If he is a gentleman—accomplished—well-connected. But, perhaps it is assumed that I am in love with him," said Miss Gray, with

a laugh, but very pale; "and that he is one of those charming gentlemen who go about in romances and melodrames, if nowhere else, making irresistible pretty speeches to adoring young ladies, and having all the time a wife or a skeleton locked up in a closet."

"Oh, no; it ain't that," said he.

"How do you know? what could be worse?" she answered again with a little laugh.

"I—the fact is—I had heard a story, but it was of a Mr. Dacre—Alfred Dacre. But Ardenbroke speaks of him as calling himself Alfred Dacre, from which it is plain that whether he be a Dacre at all, with some *other* Christian name, he certainly is not *Alfred* Dacre; and so my story is worthless. And when I wrote to Ardenbroke, I asked him"—Charles looked aside a little bashfully as he made this confession —"whether this gentleman calling himself Alfred Dacre was married, and he said positively not; and he had very lately heard every particular about him."

"Well, you may tell him, we're in no danger here, and that so far from having to deny ourselves to Mr. Dacre, he seems to have quite other people to look after, for we have not seen him here, as I told you, for some time."

And then, at Laura's instance, the patient had a glass of sherry and a biscuit, and described to her his present quarters near Highgate, and told her all the little news about himself. And though he made nothing of it, he looked pale and thin, and little more than half way on the road to recovery.

So Challys said that she and Julia Wardell would drive out some day soon, to see old Mr. Plumtree's wonderful garden, in which Charles was wont to lounge with his tweed plaid about him, on a rustic seat, reading his novel in the luxury of a listless invalid.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HAPPY HOUR.

A WEEK and more had passed, and no news of Alfred Dacre. Guildford House was sad, and never did time move in that dull mansion more slowly before.

Now and then Julia Wardell wondered whether he would ever write again, spoke dryly of his politeness, and expressed her impetuous wonder at the want alike of indignation and of kindness manifested, as she complained, by Challys Gray.

"It certainly is," she would say sarcastically to Challys Gray, "a very enviable state to be in. No affront has the slightest effect upon you! Could anything be ruder than Mr. Dacre's walking off as he has done, after all the—the——"

"*Tea*—?" said Challys Gray.

"Well, the tea was not much to talk about; but the attention, and the agreeable evenings; and, in fact, his making quite a resource of this house, and coming here to chat and sing whenever he pleased; and I do say that going off as he has done, without explanation or even farewell—why he did not say so much as good night. I was just thinking for a minute or two about something, and when I raised my eyes he had slipped out of the room; and not a line since—not a word. I do assure you, whatever you may think, I look on it as one of the rudest, coolest proceedings I ever remember hearing of."

"I daresay; but that's very much his own business. It certainly does not matter much to us whether he is the flower of courtesy—isn't that what Sancho Panza calls his master—or the most ill-bred——."

"He ain't that," interposed Mrs. Wardell.

"The most ill-bred person in London, if we are never to see him again," continued Miss Gray. "So I shan't trouble my head about it."

"You certainly do take it very coolly, considering that the poor young man may have met with some accident, or even lost his life; for I am quite sure that something must have prevented his calling here, or writing—and something very unusual, or he would have been certain to let us hear; and I'm quite uncomfortable about him; and I envy you the charming apathy with which you consign our friends to the chances of this reckless town, in which I am told, there are nine hundred accidents a week."

"Perhaps, dear Julia, I *am* a stock or a stone; but how can I help that. I did not make myself, and I really can't get either into a passion or a misery about nothing. He'll come back if he wishes, and if he doesn't he won't; and if you *will* have him dead, I humbly *hope* he won't. A little time will bring all to light."

"Well, I suppose it will. I wish you weren't looking so pale, my dear. I have been telling you, you can't be quite well, looking so poorly."

"I am, notwithstanding, quite well, I

assure you," she protested. "You'll put me quite out of conceit with myself if you go on telling me that I'm losing my looks."

"Come with me to Lady Ardenbroke's to-night—there's a good child. She'll be so disappointed; and I don't think there will be six people there."

"No, dear, I shan't go."

"What an obstinate little thing it is?"

"At what hour do you go?" asked Miss Gray.

"Nine—very early. She's an invalid still, you know."

"I shall see you before twelve, then. Give her my love, and tell her that when it came to the hour I found I could not change my mind. I really can't, you know. She's very good-natured; but she has made a little plan to steal me into society, and she would succeed before I knew where I was; and then, farewell all comfort in existence. No, I'll remain here; and if we change this drowsy life it shall be to travel—a state in which you can see everything and yet be solitary, and quite enjoy your liberty."

"I suppose, then, there's no good in my saying any more?" Mrs. Wardell looked at her, still in hope.

"None in the world, dear; and I see the carriage, and it is nearly dark; and you had better get your cloak on. Aunt Winnie is sometimes cross, you know, when people keep her waiting."

So, in a few minutes more good Mrs. Wardell was gone, and Laura Gray stood quite alone at the drawing-room window.

The shades of night stole gradually over the homely old house. The mist hung on the grass, and floated among the stems of the ancient elms, and the darkness deepened under their boughs.

The pretty lane in front was by this time quite silent. Leaning lightly against the side of the window, she was looking quite sadly and subdued, down that dark vista where midway his carriage-lamps used to shine on nights like this.

"He'll never come again—never."

And still she listened and watched; and I know not what fancies chased one another

through her pretty head, and what yearnings were at her heart. In this lonely musing nearly half an hour passed, and she turned away with a deep sigh, and sitting down in a low chair took a book. I don't think she read a great deal—and more than once she sighed, and again fell into her reverie.

I wish I could say that she was interrupted in some more romantic way. The fact is the door opened, and the servant announced Mr. Dacre.

She raised her head, and saw him standing at the open door with his accustomed smile.

There was silence for a little while—

"I havn't written—I preferred coming; and beside I couldn't write," said he. "It is so much pleasanter and wiser to talk. A letter, you know, is blind and deaf, and neither sees when you look weary, nor hears when you say 'enough', but bores on with inflexible stupidity till it has quite said out its say; and for this, and a thousand better reasons, I'm glad I did not write."

"Oh yes, I always think so," said Challys Gray, scarcely knowing what she said. "I never write a note when I can help it. It is so much better—one can *say* everything so much more easily."

"This drawing-room, this room—" he was looking round it in a wild reverie—"what a dream it all is! and, oh, Miss Gray, this hour. I'm to sing for you, mind, as usual, and to talk—all just in the old way it shall be; and it has been to me a year since I saw you."

"It is, you know, a good many days," said Challys Gray; "and—we are not to talk in a melancholy way; and now have I any news to tell—nothing, I think, except, indeed, this, that my cousin Julia has gone to drink tea with Lady Ardenbroke this evening; but she'll not be very long away; and her dog is quite recovered; and the old cracked china vase you used to admire is broken, and gone to some wonderful woman in Long-acre, who puts all the bits together again, and makes annihilation harmless."

"You'll tell me where to find her?"

"Are you going to put her skill in requisition?"

"Yes."

"What have you broken?"

"A trifle called a heart—my own—and so I had a right to break it."

"It must have been very ill constructed. Those ornaments should be made quite solid, and they would be less liable to accidents," said Laura.

"Yes, made of stone, I daresay. And now, for my little time, I'm going to be quite happy, that is to say, quite mad."

"That sounds very wild, Mr. Dacre; yet, I daresay, there is some truth in it," and she laughed. "People, I suppose, can only be happy by imagining something, and forgetting a great deal?"

"Yes, Miss Gray," said he, "one can forget a great deal, but never everything; like others we long for the lotus; but who would quite forget? It is to its saddest records that memory clings most fondly. I suppose by the time life turns into a retrospect every memory has some one melancholy

treasure, the secret of all its pain, from which it would not part for all its other stores. But I'm not going to be sad. I'll wear my fool's-cap, if you allow me, this evening, and you wont despise me if my music is mingled with its bells. And—and you have been quite well ever since?"

"Yes, thanks; very well."

"And the invalid of the Silver Dragon——"

"Recovering very fast," she replied; but he perceived that she was embarrassed as she answered, and his eye rested with a quiet curiosity upon her for a moment or two, before he spoke.

"Recovering, recovering; yes, its time he should; he has been out, has he, and here?"

"Yes, only once, for twenty minutes or so, and he has established himself somewhere at Highgate," said Miss Gray.

"And talked of me?" said the gay man, with a smile.

"Very little; and I don't mean to discuss his poor little visit any more. He staid hardly any time, and he looks very

far from well," said Laura Gray, "and he must have been a great deal more ill, and his hurt a great deal worse than I had any idea of."

"Yes," said her visitor, abstractedly. "And—and what about Ardenbroke?"

"Still in Scotland."

"Enjoying himself, I daresay, and now and then writing letters. I should not be surprised, if he sometimes asked after me."

The young gentleman was smiling.

"Now come, Mr. Dacre, you'll take nothing by your cleverness," she answered; "for I made up my mind long ago that I never would talk of one acquaintance to another; and therefore, one of your insinuated questions I wont answer."

"A misfortune it is to be gifted with a curious temperament, and I'm awfully curious, where sympathy is withheld, and illumination denied."

"I pity you immensely, but I can't assist you—no indeed."

"Can a poor curious devil prevail nothing by entreaty?"

"I renounce curious devils, and hold no parley with them."

"Quite obdurate?"

"Quite."

"Do you think a song might possibly prevail?"

"I don't say it will, but you shall try."

"Instantly."

And so he did.

CHAPTER XX.

UNMASKED.

He did sing, and then they chatted about fifty things, he in the same gay spirits.

Swiftly and gaily flew the hour. Had he ever been so merry before? She felt his eyes upon her now and then as if he were meditating a talk perhaps of another kind. But if it was coming it was still deferred, and his wild spirits carried on their dialogue in its old channel.

As he talked on with a gaiety almost excited, there lay before him open on the piano, a pretty song which was then not old. Its words are taken from the fine lyrics of Rokeby, and it begins—

"Oh Brignall banks are wild and fair,
And Greta woods are green,
I'd rather roam with Edmund there
Than reign our English queen."

It is said that when a spirit enters the room, a chill is felt, and the lights at the moment faint, the powers of life suddenly subside, and with the shadow comes a sense of fear.

A change came suddenly over this young man's face; it grew pale, and the ghost only of its smile still lingered there. He was looking down upon the open song, and his slender finger pointed to the bar on which his eye was fixed, and with a thrilling voice to the minor melody he sang the mysterious words of the outlaw—

"Maiden, a nameless life I lead,
A nameless death I'll die:
The fiend whose lantern lights the mead,
Were better mate than I."

The ghostly minor of the melody rang for a moment in the air; there was a silence, and then she heard his voice, very faintly, with a faint laugh, say—

"That's pretty well for a tenor dying of consumption, so my doctors tell me, but I don't believe them. And—*there* I stop.

The last of my voice you have heard—in this room it will never sound again."

There was a silence for a little time, and he rambled on—

"When a prodigal like *me* reappears, he may hear not a welcome but a scream; let him return to the darkness whence he came. Call for his ring—of iron, and the best robe—web and woof—a winding sheet. Miss Gray, I wonder as I stand before you, how I ever dared to profane your presence. How is it no instinct told you when I stole into your house that something *evil* had come; how did you look at me without a shudder? Good God!—how I pawned my very soul to reach you, and then, villain though I was, threw down my last stake to save you. I'll not describe myself, my immeasurable treason and—adoration. But oh, Challys, remember I went away penitent, and with a heart quite broken, to expiate all I can of my crime, in uncomplaining misery. Good-by, and for God's sake forgive me."

His hands were clasped in agony, and his imploring eyes fixed on her, and he saw

before him, not Challys Gray but her ghost. For a time he waited, but no answer came, and slowly he turned away to leave the room, with such a look of agony as a soul departing may turn for one moment, toward the eternal bar.

It is not easy to remember, far less to describe, the stun of a dreadful discovery. Challys Gray has had her warnings—she can't complain—some vague misgivings too. But, alas! as the love is—so is the faith.

And now on a sudden, at her feet, the earth has opened, and the pale prophet is there, and she stands before him—hearing, yet not hearing—seeing, yet not seeing. There is just the dim consciousness that Alfred Dacre is going away for ever.

With a sudden cry, awaking as it were, Challys Gray said—

"Come back—come back—come back; I was always very frank—it does not matter now how I speak, and that is well, for I will hide nothing. Oh, Alfred, I love you more than you'll ever be loved

again, and I'll never more care for any one on earth, and I wanted just to say that, and to bid you good-by for ever—and ever, and ever—good-by."

She was looking up in his face, her hands were laid on his shoulders, and her face looked white and wild with misery.

He stooped and kissed her lips, in a dream, and when he raised his head again, those eyes of unutterable misery, that seemed looking into eternity, were still gazing up in his face, as if they had never moved.

"Shall I tell you all, Challys?" he said, almost in a whisper.

"Oh, no—no—no; you shall always be the same Alfred Dacre, my hero—no, nothing shall sully him, my one dream. Oh, Alfred, if you had died, and I had died, an hour after, and this had never been, and God had taken us to his mercy, and we had met——"

"Challys, if I could only show my unspeakable love—if I had but a chance to redeem my hopes—or to lay down my

life for you—but God has denied me everything."

"No, Alfred, there is one hope for us yet," cried Challys, wildly; "if you remember poor Challys Gray, or care for her, you will travel a long pilgrimage, so will I patiently. A good man told me once that those that try, with all their hearts, to go to Heaven, will go there. There has been something very bad,—God help us all! who dare go before his judgment?—but *I'll never* hear it; and if we try, it may be a long, and sorrowful journey, but at last we'll reach it. And oh, Alfred, *Alfred*," she almost screamed, "we'll *meet*—promise, promise, oh, don't you promise—it is not good-by for *ever*, darling. I'll see you there."

He clasped her for one wild moment close in his arms. She felt the throbbing of his heart, and heard him say—but there was no voice in the words, a sob, a whisper—"Challys, Challys, my treasure—my darling," and he went.

He hurried down the stairs, and through the hall. She heard the hall-door shut

and the sound of the receding steps outside. With a bursting heart, she listened, and the roll of wheels, and the clash of the iron gate followed, and the last vestige of her dream was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

NEXT day in Mr. de Beaumirail's rooms in the Fleet there was a stormy scene.

Mr. Levi had accompanied Mr. de Beaumirail the night before in his carriage, attending on behalf of the triumvirate in command of the body-guard who were posted secretly at the points of egress from the house, to secure that adventurer, should he a second time attempt to effect his escape.

The Jew's suspicions had been vaguely, but powerfully, aroused by the obstinate silence, and finally by the savage fury of the young man, on their way back. That did not look like the temper of a man on the eve of liberation and fortune. From De Beaumirail, however, he could, for that

night, extract nothing, and he drove off to old Gillespie, and together they shrewdly and uncomfortably compared their surmises.

Next day, in consequence, in an uncomfortable state of doubt, looking grim and gloomy, after their several fashions, Messrs. Larkin, Gillespie, and Levi, assembled early in Mr. de Beaumirail's sitting-room.

That gentleman lay obstinately on the sofa in his bedroom. Mr. Gillespie, however, at length came to be of opinion, that "these sort o' tricks could not be suffered longer," and accordingly he knocked and clamoured imperiously at his door, whereupon Mr. de Beaumirail sprang to his feet, and confronted Gillespie, demanding, with a savage malediction, and a look of fury, what the devil he meant by making that noise in his rooms?

Whereupon Mr. Gillespie sturdily explained the object of their presence there, and declared that they expected Mr. de Beaumirail to report progress, "and we require to know defeenitively how the matter stands?"

"It *stands*, sir," answered De Beaumirail, with a savage stamp on the floor.

"How the deil do you mean, sir?"

"Stock still," answered he; "your conspiracy has broken down, you three d——d scoundrels, and your money is buried under it; and if you ever dare to allude to it again in my presence, I'll brain you with the poker."

When his three visitors clearly saw how matters were, their fury boiled over.

Gillespie raved and cursed like an old bedlamite, and swore that one way or another he would "*have* him."

Levi more pointedly swore that he would leave no stone unturned to bring his French property into the court, and that he would never die till he saw him starving in prison.

And Mr. Larkin, black as thunder, swore not at all, but hinted his belief that the young gentleman had exposed himself to criminal proceedings, on what precise charge, however, he did not care to disclose.

But De Beaumirail brought all this yelling and thunder to an end by turning his

enraged visitors out of his room. Some months ago he would have laughed in cynical gaiety over such a scene, but that spirit was dead and gone. Even the little excitement died away before the sound of their steps.

A bright eye—a bright hectic—and the clear pallor which doctors read so easily, showed this day in the handsome young face of the prisoner.

De Beaumirail was very ill. A nervous temperament—so highly strung and impulsive—cannot long withstand the agitations which try all people sorely in incipient disease. In his system the nerves and brain prevailed. The light and fire—passion and impulse of a fierce and volatile nature—dominated him; and now had come the reaction of apathy and despair.

It was toward sunset, as a man might know by the ruddy light upon the old brick chimney-tops visible from his window, when his old friend, Doctor Wiley, who generally amused a drowsy hour or so daily with De Beaumirail's case, dropped in to make his usual visit.

He asked him questions; listened at his waistcoat; and retailed, I am afraid unheard, between these professional exercises the dreary news and gossip of the place.

The doctor was in no hurry to go away. There was no fashionable brougham waiting at the door to whirl him at a showy pace away to sick lords' and great ladies' doors; he was rich, if in nothing else, in that invaluable treasure, time; and bestowed it liberally upon the fallen star of fashion, whose light was soon to be quenched for ever.

As usual, he read the backs of De Beaumirail's books, and tumbled over the leaves abstractedly, and whistled gently in his reverie—as he did when his talk was pretty well exhausted.

De Beaumirail seldom wished the harmless loiterer away; was often not conscious of his presence; and, as on this occasion, he stood in his deshabille at the window, with his lank thin hair, very gray, hanging over his ruddy forehead and somewhat dissipated nose, with a lackadaisical patient smile,

and his dusty and faded clothes in the reflected light, he might have been sketched, De Beaumirail thought, with a shovel in his hand, for a boosy old village sexton.

"Well," said De Beaumirail, with a sudden sigh, and looking at him as if he had just awaked, "when am I to make my little excursion to the country?"

"Steal a march on the warden, hey? Is that what you're thinking of? No, no, we'll not give you a chance that way. You're too potent a spirit, sir, to be laid so easily."

"Spirit—spirits in wood—as the distillers say in the newspapers—they export some that way from this store sometimes," said De Beaumirail, listlessly.

"Ha, ha—spirits in wood—by Jove, sir, that's not so bad. Ha, ha, ha! But egad, sir, you're the sort of spirit that will keep a long time in the stone-jug, hey? and be nothing the worse."

"You're a good-natured fellow; but I should be very glad to die."

"Come, none of your bosh and nonsense!" said the doctor, with a jolly air.

"I'm tired, sir."

"Tut, sir. Hang it—life's sweet," said the doctor, with a wave of his hand towards the court, as if the gaieties and glories of the world were there at his command.

"I suppose so, doctor; but it's a sweet one tires of sometimes. I've had enough," he sighed, "and I want sleep."

"You'll not be so to-morrow, sir," said the doctor, kindly. "I've been that way myself now and then, sir; it clears up after a while, and who knows but a good time's coming."

And so, after a little more, the doctor withdrew; and shortly after the withdrawal of that luminary, twilight came, and a dismal attendant came in and lighted De Beaumirail's candles.

"Many a rich fellow dying at this moment, who would give his soul to live ten years longer. How gladly I'd take his hours, and leave him my years, were they sixty."

And to this bitter reflection, common to those who wish for death, we leave him.

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. DE BEAUMIRAIL AND HIS FATHER CONFESSOR.

"It was very good of you to come, Mr. Parker," he said, more than an hour after, when the good old clergyman entered his door, "your trouble with me, I hope, will soon be ended, and I wanted to have a talk with you. I wanted to explain what has been going on; it will make you stare. I'll tell it shortly and intelligibly. You'll think me what I am when I have related my little story."

"Think you what you *are*—what do you mean?" asked Mr. Parker.

"The vilest miscreant on earth, except three—my three accomplices—Larkin, Levi, and Gillespie—but no, they are not so bad; they have excuses that I have not—I sup-

pose—at least, they are three vulgar villains, and I—I ought to have recoiled from the cowardice of fraud."

"I'm totally in the dark, sir," said the old clergyman, "your language, I hope, is very exaggerated; I'm very sure it is, judging from all I know of you."

"My dear sir, you know *nothing* of me, no more than you do of that heinous Christian, Mr. Larkin."

"Oh! my dear sir, pray don't."

"I'll tell you my story, and then judge us all round, sir. Sit down, pray. How rude of me to have left you standing for so long."

The old man sat down, and De Beaumirail said—

"One promise only I exact before I make my disclosure—one word I tell you, you must never repeat to any living being—secresy can no longer compromise anyone, and the only person who had a right to hear it, if she pleased, refused—and—she spared me that."

There was a silence for a little, and De

Beaumirail, who had walked to the window and looked out for a time, to hide some violent emotion, returned and said—

"Well, sir, you promise?"

"Yes, I do sir, I see no difficulty."

"No, I conceal nothing. You must know then that when Miss Gray refused to subscribe the list of creditors consenting to give me my liberty, I conceived an intense hatred of her, and I would have gone great lengths for revenge. Levi, Larkin, and Gillespie, wanted to get me out; they fancied I could have been of immense use in introducing a project, by which they expected to make money, to some people of rank in Paris with whom I once was intimate—perhaps I could, perhaps I could not—it happened, however, that they were of that opinion, and resolved to make that use of me."

"I—I suppose they meant honourably, sir. You certainly did once know many influential people there," said Mr. Parker.

"All honourable men, sir; and being for a purpose anxious to get me out, they were

as angry as I at our failure. And now, sir, the devil who was always at my side possessed me, and in my fury I threw out the spark that smouldered and kindled, and was not far from accomplishing an infernal sacrifice."

"I don't understand, sir; but you did abandon yourself to a vindictive and violent feeling," said Mr. Parker, reprovingly.

"I knew nothing of Miss Gray's real character then. I thought it was just that cruel womanish malice that runs away with things, and thinks the world well lost for a sharp revenge. Good heavens! how I mistook her—and the recoil; well I deserve it. And now, sir, I'll tell you what my plan was—the plan of a miscreant—but I'm not the least ashamed of it; by Heaven, under the same persuasion I'd go into it again. I'm no slave of hypocrisies, and if I set about punishing an enemy, I do it effectually."

"I don't think, Mr. De Beaumirail, that I am a fitting repository for any such confidences," said the clergyman.

"Don't misunderstand me, sir; I do not

tell it from the mere wish to talk about myself, but with a very serious purpose; pray permit me."

"Well, sir, on that ground."

"Thank you, Mr. Parker. Now, sir, here it was in effect. I said to those scoundrels, suppose you try a new enterprise; you can buy up my debts for a song, for three thousand pounds you can buy up thirty thousand; all but that young lady's. Then get me out of this place altogether, or at least every day—you know how to manage the warden—and I'll marry Miss Gray without a settlement; and you may pay yourselves out of Gray Forest—turn your three thousand into thirty—and I'll have my own share, and lead her a life. That was my retort on the young lady's imagined malice."

"Now, sir, again I say, this shocking disclosure ought not to have been for my ears," said the old gentleman, aghast.

"Sir, there's nothing in it; you may take it up in your hands and examine it. That infernal machine can never explode,

thank Heaven, and you *promised* to hear me. Now, Mr. Parker, I was naturally a conceited fellow, having had some success in a brilliant world. I was young and all that, and I had some music and drawing and all the kind of thing that interests girls; and I thought the devil was in it,—I beg your pardon, I mean that it would be very strange indeed if, with certain conditions, an impression were not made. Nothing could be more favourable. Here was a young lady who knew *nothing* of the world, who had passed the few years that might otherwise have been given to seeing something of that great and noisy place, in attendance upon an invalided father, and who was at the time living a life of entire seclusion, with no one to take care of her but a very foolish old woman."

"Merciful Heaven, sir! How could you engage in such a cruel imposture?"

"You can't comprehend it, but *I* can tell you; put a fellow in here for three or four of the best years of his life, with a moral certainty of ending his days in his prison, and

give him a chance to recover liberty and fortune by the same *coup* that punishes his worst enemy, and you'll not find him troubled with many scruples about it. You have no idea of what a man who is good for anything becomes in a place like this; when he sees his years and his chances gliding from him, and no chance of going out but in his coffin."

The clergyman made no answer, but remained with ear inclined, looking downward with a look of pain.

"Well, sir, Mr. Gillespie learned that Miss Gray was coming to the opera, and, after nearly four years passed within these walls, I emerged. We sat in a box nearly opposite, for it was as well that I should see the young lady; and a harmless accident to her carriage as she returned home had been arranged with her coachman, to enable me, under the name of Dacre, to introduce myself by a little service, and to found on it an excuse for a visit of inquiry; and so the acquaintance was made. That night at the opera, as luck would have it, Arden-

broke saw and knew me; and—in the dark, like the rest of the world, as to where I had been for years—I told him such lies as answered my purpose, and tied him by a promise not to mention my name or visit, as I called it, to London. I'm afraid, sir, you think I have taken a liberty with your text, and let my yea be nay, and my nay yea; and so it was from first to last, almost—not *quite*—last of this villany."

"I'm filled, I confess, sir, with astonishment and horror."

"So you ought—so ought I—I suppose. But my theory is, that if you practise a deception, it ought to be thoroughly practised. It is illogical to stick at subsidiary lies. The fraud seems now to me odious, mean, and truculent, because I have ceased to think of its contemplated victim as I did. Nothing draws man and woman together like a secret to be kept between them; nothing gratifies the pride and elicits the love of woman like a man's devoting himself to danger for her sake; nothing cherishes that tenderness like being, by any means always

present to her thought; nothing heightens the romantic feeling like a little mystery—all this was provided for by some real reserves; for I dared not tell her who I was, and for plain reasons I was obliged to conduct my stolen exits from this place with caution; for had I been seen and recognised, it might have cleared matters up with a clap of thunder. But it was provided for elaborately by a cruel imposture, which amused me, the drama of a pretended conspiracy conducted by anonymous letters.

"All *that* I hate to think of now. When I conceived it I was mad with malice and misery; it was delight to me to torture my enemy in the process of subjugation."

Mr. Parker sighed deeply.

"I see, sir, all this pains you. I don't mind telling you, now that it wrings my own heart with anguish and fury to think of my stupidity—how long it was before my eyes were opened. Good heavens, sir! that I should have seen a fiend in that angel! Oh, sir—oh, Mr. Parker, I don't believe that any human soul ever suffered

before what I am enduring now: not remorse—no, I despise that feeling,—but an eternal leave-taking, the separation of the damned. I should lose my reason or cut my throat if it were not for one hope."

"The Christian has always—if he will only look for it—in his darkest hour, and wildest wanderings, a hope eternal as the love and truth of God," said Mr. Parker.

"To that hope, sir, my eyes are blind. The hope I mean is death."

"Let every man labour while it is called day, that death may prove repose for him. He thinks of the poor body on its pillow of clay, and of death as no more than a cold slumber; but no, sir, the body is but the cenotaph he leaves behind him. The man himself is awake, and far away, receiving the recompense of his life."

"We'll not dispute about that now, sir," answered De Beaumirail, gently enough. "I'm willing to take it as a sleep, and I think it is not far off. I'm sure it isn't. I could not feel as I do if it were; and now, sir, you'll never tell her while I live

who was that Alfred Dacre who grew from hating to love her so."

After a short silence the old clergyman said thoughtfully—

"Why, Mr. De Beaumirail, should you not write to the young lady and tell her this whole truth?"

"Write to her! I'd die a thousand deaths first. While I live she shall never know more; no, if she had commanded it I should have confessed all, but she was merciful; that dreadful ordeal she remitted; and now, if you, my one true friend, from a mistaken kindness, betray me, by Heaven I'll put a pistol to my head, and end my life the hour I hear it. Oh, sir, I rely on you—your promise—you wont betray me."

"Sir, I'll keep my promise. Without your leave I never dreamed of speaking to Miss Gray on the subject; only it seemed to me a natural thing to do," said the old man.

"Ah! sir, you don't know. But when I'm dead you may—you will; and say that, adoring her as I did, I honoured her too much

to shock her with the revelation of my name. Tell her she could never have thought more vilely of me than I do of myself; and that what I dared not have sued for while living, she will, perhaps, grant to the dead—forgiveness. And, oh! sir—you'll not forsake me."

"You shall see me, sir, at least as often as ever; and—about your health—pray tell me who is your medical man," asked Mr. Parker.

De Beaumirail smiled.

"You've seen him here once or twice, and might have taken him for what he metaphorically is—a grave-digger. He is a fellow-lodger in this retired wing of the palace of justice, and his name is Wiley."

"A skilful man, I hope?"

"Really, sir, I don't know; but I have what is termed entire confidence in him. Never refuse to see him, drunk or sober. Allow him to feel my pulse, and listen to the secrets of my heart. Let him call my complaints by what hard names he pleases, and I never interrupt him; and in so far

may be said to take his advice, but not his medicine; and I believe he is a jolly, half-mad, miserable prisoner like myself."

"Well, I must say good night. I think you seem a little better," said Mr. Parker, "and I hope you'll find yourself a great deal better to-morrow."

"Thanks, sir. Fellows like me, who live in this odd place, are always *going* to be better to-morrow. It is the easiest way of improving, and leads a man cheerfully on his journey like the bell that tinkles between the donkey's ears, and always an inch or two in advance, amuses the Alpine march."

And having said these words, he bid his old friend good night.

"Good night, sir," said Mr. Parker, "and I will look in very soon again," and away he went; and De Beaumirail stood looking down the dark void of the staircase, in deeper misery than anyone who had listened to his cynical trifling, a moment before, could have imagined. It was about the hour when, well muffled to escape re-

cognition at the door, he used to walk out, accompanied by old Gillespie, or it might be by Mr. Levi, well known and influential people in that locality, and get into his brougham and go off in a dream to Guildford House.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MUTAT TERRA VICES.

In a little time Lord Ardenbroke returned to London. A note awaited him which quite relieved him on the uneasy subject of Guildford House and its masquerading visitor.

It was written by De Beaumirail, and reminded him that he was under promise of secrecy, and upon the sole condition of his continuing to observe it, now promised that no communication, by letter or message, should ever again be opened with the tenants of that mansion. It said—"When you heard that the pretended Alfred Dacre was admitted at Guildford House, I can understand your surprise and anxiety only too well. You will not inflict upon a very miserable man the additional anguish of a

useless disclosure. I appeal to your magnanimity and your justice. I enclose the address of a friend who will see you, should you wish it, and answer in confidence any questions you may care to ask. But I submit I have a right to your silence, and I insist on your promise to respect my secret."

Lord Ardenbroke did hold his tongue very scrupulously on the subject, seeing that no duty any longer conflicted with this claim of secrecy.

And now the House was up, the season quite over, and London emptied of its great people, and even in large measure of its small. The dowager Lady Ardenbroke was at Brighton, and her son on the Scotch moors. But Guildford House had not closed its shutters, nor locked its doors. Challys Gray lingered on, and Julia Wardell dozed contentedly over her crochet and her novel, and walked her dog up and down the avenue twice a day, and noted his appetite and spirits with more than maternal solicitude, and I daresay the

servants' hall and housekeeper's room had their ideas respecting the hum-drum life to which they were condemned.

Challys Gray had found a new pursuit. Was she changed? There was not change enough for Julia Wardell, who was with her day by day, to take note of. She chatted very much as usual; she went out as usual in her carriage; there was the customary shopping; and sometimes she recurred to her old plan of foreign travel, and made ideal tours, and seemed interested with maps and guide-books for an hour at a time.

But for all that there was a change. It had come in a moment. An eternal farewell to the untold hope. The feeling that grew, day by day, duller and darker—that time was doing nothing

"To lift that longing from her heart."

She had taken old Mr. Parker very much into counsel, and also a curate who had the care of the district round her. She had made herself, after the manner of young

ladies grieved at heart, who have no nunneries to go into, a Dorcas, a volunteer Sister of Mercy. I merely mention this very common-place fact, having no intention of following her little rambles or visitations among the sick and needy.

Of course she talked to these poor people, and gave them good little books and other things. But when young ladies visit so, it is, as a rule, their money that is welcome, and not their tracts, nor, I am afraid, even their pretty faces.

It was, however, occupation, and of that grave, melancholy, and yet comforting sort which accords with a mind wounded, and in danger of subsiding into utter apathy.

Charles Mannering was now a great deal better, and every day at Guildford House; and with a sure instinct, conscious, though he never hinted that sad knowledge to anyone, that Challys Gray had known her first love—blighted it might be—yet, still, there would always remain that pre-occupation. Challys Gray, *he* could see, though good Mrs. Wardell did not, was quite changed.

She laughed and talked pretty much as usual; but often she fell into reveries, in which she looked so sad and hopeless, that he wondered that anyone on earth could be worth so much of Challys Gray's sorrow.

Very devoted he was. He walked with her on her little daily circuits, carried her little basket, for she was in a mood that yearned for all kinds of humilities, and no servant attended her, and Challys thought she was doing "good works," and that she had never known what "charity" was before. But Challys had always been kind and open-handed. In the matter of liberality there was nothing to change. The change was in the mode and practice of distribution, and was, on the whole, harmless, and to herself useful. It afforded her occupation, and introduced her to scenes that accorded with her melancholy mood, and gave her sterner, and also tenderer notions of God's dealings with His creatures than inexperienced people in her rank of life entertain; it startled her also with a nearer

sense of the responsibilities of wealth, and filled her with a juster awe of futurity.

This kind of thing, thought Charles Mannering, can't last for ever, and when she gives it up it will be a sign that she has come to herself, also, in other matters. "It may take some time," and he sighed, "but one day or another it will be so."

So we reason—the head against the heart—logic against the presentiment. The steel passes through the phantom and it stands there still. The shadowy augury is not of reason, and will not be killed by its weapon.

Charles Mannering knew that she was changed, and felt, as other men have felt, that the heart over which a sorrowful first-love has passed, will never be quite the same again. With this melancholy, however, there was now a quietude. The agitation and the burning gall of rivalry he had done with, and he was always near beautiful Challys Gray.

It was late in October now. The leaves were rustling on the avenue, or skipping and whirling over the grass, in the rough autumnal gusts, and still pretty Challys

Gray remained at Guildford House, and the nun-like life went on.

One day she said to old Mr. Parker, who had come, as was his wont, with a list of "cases of distress," to Challys Gray, whose purse was always open—

"I have been thinking, Mr. Parker, about that poor prisoner——"

She paused at these words reflectively.

"What poor prisoner, Miss Gray?" the old man asked, a little inquisitively.

"I mean Mr. de Beaumirail;" she answered.

"Oh, Mr. de Beaumirail! Yes—yes—to be sure," repeated he.

And he looked steadily on her, with a kind of apprehension, expecting something.

But Challys Gray looked quite frank, and her face indicated neither doubt nor reserve, as she continued—

"You told me once, Mr. Parker, that my feeling about that matter was a superstition, and that no such auguries should stand in the way of an act of simple mercy. I could not listen to you then; but I have been

thinking, and I have made up my mind to oppose his release no longer."

"But, my dear Miss Gray, it is no longer in your power; the other creditors have withdrawn their consent, and nothing can now persuade them to renew it."

"I'm very sorry; but I'm glad I spoke before I knew this new difficulty. Well, if this cannot be, at least you must persuade him to allow me, through you, to be of some use."

"You mean, Miss Gray, to furnish him with money. I dare not hint at such a thing. I know very well how such a proposal would be received. Besides you need have no uneasiness upon that point. He has some property in France which his creditors cannot touch, and which is ample for all his present wants; and he is not, I fear, likely very long to enjoy any rights that remain to him, for the physician that attends him seems to think that his life now hangs upon a thread."

"Ill, is he?—Fever, or what is his complaint?" she asked, evidently shocked.

"No, nothing of that kind. One of those complaints of the heart, his doctor says, which may kill him at any moment," answered Mr. Parker.

"I have behaved very cruelly," she said, with a contraction of her brow, as she looked down, very pale, "but not with a cruel motive—no—*no*—*not* with a cruel motive—I never was cruel; I was often angry, but never cruel or unforgiving—*say* that of me—you know it, Mr. Parker."

"I *do* know it, Miss Gray. I never charged you with anything worse than an entirely erroneous idea of your duty; there is no use in discussing it now, because no practical effect can now result from it, and you have shown that you cease to hold that opinion by offering to sign his release."

"Sir, I'm glad you understand. It is very unhappy—what a world this is!"

"I have been out of town for some days, and mean to see him to-morrow, when I am making my visits, between three and four, and if you desire it I can mention the wishes you have expressed."

"And tell him, sir, that I ask his forgiveness, and would receive the news that he had accepted my offer with gratitude as a token of that forgiveness."

And thus charged, Mr. Parker took his departure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REQUIESCAT.

THREE days later old Mr. Parker was at Guildford House, very grave, with something to tell.

He did not go up to the drawing-room, where the ladies were. He asked to see Miss Gray in the library, only for a few minutes.

The young lady came down, and when she looked on his face there came a foreboding of ill.

Pretty much as usual he greeted her; but there was a little constraint, and a hesitation about opening his business, that made her ask, with a rather alarmed look fixed on him—

"Is there any news—anything about any friend of mine?"

"No, nothing; I can't say anything about your *friends*, Miss Gray, but about Mr. de Beaumirail; I have to tell you first that you need think of him or his troubles no more."

There was a silence, and after two or three seconds Miss Gray said, very low—

"Oh, really!" as she looked in a kind of sorrowful consternation in the old man's eyes.

"Yes; he died very suddenly on Monday evening. He had been as usual. The doctor says, he talked with him in the course of the day, and saw no change. He might, he says, humanly speaking, have possibly lived for a year or more."

"Were you with him?" she asked.

"Yes; I changed my plans after seeing you, and went there, and I found him at his desk reading some old letters. He was very much dejected. He asked all about you, so I gave him your message, and he seemed affected; and he said, '*I* forgive *her!* Ah, sir, you know that is folly. I only hope the time will come when she will

forgive me; I know it will; her forgiveness will follow me to the grave, for death is the seal of repentance, and she will know me better when I die.' So I told him I had met the doctor in the court, and that he had not apparently any unusual apprehensions about him, and he smiled and said, 'The blind leading the blind. I don't mind doctors; but there's an understanding between the dying man and death, and signs as slight as lovers' exchange, of which *they* see nothing; therefore don't mind him.' And then he made me tell him over again all about you, and he said, after a silence, 'Have you ever heard her sing?'"

"How came he to know that I sang? But I have not for some time—and I think I never shall again," she said.

"And when he had talked a little more," continued Mr. Parker, "seemingly all the time very sad, and in a gentle mood, he said at last, 'Would you mind opening that window? I should like a little more air.' It was just at sunset, and he said, smiling,

'Look at those old brick chimneys; isn't it odd, everything in this light looks picturesque, and even sad? I watch them every evening till the twilight hides them. People learn ways of making time pass, sir, in places like this;' and then he told me over again his message to you, and he said with a little gasp, 'Is there air?' and with one slight gasp more he suddenly fell back. I thought he had fainted; I could not believe it was all over. I called the doctor, whom I saw walking in the court, and when he came he saw how it was. He was gone."

"Oh, dear, sir, it's very sad and dreadful, and yet what could I do?"

"I gave him your message, and told him of your offer; and although it was as I thought, and he could not accept it, he was very grateful, and very much moved."

"I'm glad you told him—it was kind. I am very much obliged—and pray tell me all he said."

"He spoke of your forgiveness in the terms I mentioned, and he said, pointing to his desk, 'As you came in, I was reading a note of hers.'"

"Reading a note of mine! A note written by *me*, do you mean?"

"I have been charged by him, Miss Gray, to make an explanation which pains me; I wish the task had devolved on any other person."

Mr. Parker was speaking with averted eyes, and with the profound embarrassment of one who expects to awaken very painful emotions.

"Pray do; I am quite in the dark, and can't think how Mr. de Beaumirail could have obtained possession of any note of mine; though, perhaps, indeed it does not very much matter, for I have never written a note in which I need wish anything changed, or need in the least regret."

Mr. Parker sighed and shook his head, and seemed at a loss how to proceed. But it was to be got through somehow, so he said—

"He did not say what they were; he did not speak of them as being on any subject of the least importance; he merely spoke of them as relics which he prized very dearly;

and when he spoke of your music, it was in reference to a time, not many months ago, when he, under a feigned name, used to come here and contribute to it in the evenings,—indeed, for a time, nearly every evening."

As he thus spoke Mr. Parker raised his eyes, and was startled. Challys Gray was standing before him with a face so wild and pale, her hand pressed to her temple, that he expected to see her drop to the ground.

With a wild cry came the words, "Oh, it was Alfred Dacre, and you hid it! Oh, wicked old man! how *could* you? And it was this—and in prison. Oh, Alfred, Alfred; oh, God, he's *gone!*"

She had caught him by the arm, and was clasping it with trembling hands, as she gazed with her large affrighted eyes in his face.

"You'll see, Miss Gray, by-and-by," he pleaded, "you will indeed, that I am not the least to blame in this matter. I could not divulge, without violating a solemn promise, the little he had chosen to disclose."

"You let him die, you cruel old man, and never told me; and I—I—oh, my God, I have killed him!"

"Miss Gray, listen to me, I entreat," said the old man, gently. "From all I can learn, no power on earth could have saved him. He died of some affection of the heart. I forget the name, but the doctor tells me it must have been established more than a year ago; certainly before you saw him, and probably at least a full year before that time; therefore, as to the event, his remaining in prison, or coming out, was quite immaterial."

"And where is he? Oh, take me to him—I must see him."

"Poor child, that can't be; he was laid in his last resting-place this morning. I attended and read the service," said he.

For some time she was silent, gazing in his face, and then, with a long, low, and bitter cry, the storm broke—wild words, better forgotten.

He was glad when she burst into tears, and wept for some time in silence.

The old man, experienced in grief, did not interrupt, and the silence was broken her only by moaning and convulsive sobs.

"Oh, tell me everything," at last she said; "tell me from the beginning, that I may try to understand; you saw it all."

And he told his sad story from first to last, and then again—and then again—and then they talked, she still weeping, for a long time; and at last he went, and she ran up to her room, and locked the door, and kneeled with her head on the side of her bed, weeping wildly, and that evening she did not go down.

Next day the old clergyman called again, and Miss Gray went down, cloaked and veiled, to the library, and they drove away in a cab which he had brought there. It was to the cemetery where De Beaumirail is laid.

CONCLUSION.

NEARLY a year after, Challys Gray at length put her long-deferred plan of foreign travel in execution, and about a year later she and Julia Wardell were joined at Naples by old Lady Ardenbroke and her son.

Two years had passed, therefore, since the occurrences mentioned in the preceding chapters. That faithful fellow, Charles Mannering, with now and then a month's absence in England, was always in attendance, only to be employed reading to them in the evenings, and supplying, on all occasions, his convenient escort. Lord Ardenbroke's pretty yacht was in the bay. There was just breeze enough for a lazy sail, and Lord Ardenbroke, beside Miss Gray, no one overhearing, as the fleet schooner glided through the smooth water, said—

"Why don't you, Challys, follow a good example?"

"Whose example?"

"Charles Mannering's."

Lord Ardenbroke looked very arch as he said this, and Laura, a little perplexed and curious, looked at him expectingly.

He only laughed.

"Well," she said, "I don't see anything particularly to imitate in him, except that he is the best creature in the world."

"And if there can be two best, you are one of them Challys; but that isn't it; he's going home, you know, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Challys, looking hard at her companion; "but he'll be coming back, I suppose, in four or five weeks?"

"Don't be too sure of that," said he, with a laugh.

"Well, he has not told me; I suppose he'll do as he likes about that; but what do you mean?"

"Can you keep a secret, Challys?"

"A secret? yes—I hope I can."

"Well you must promise quite seriously

that you'll not let Charles know that you have heard a word about it, for he'd know instantly that it was I who had told."

"Yes, I'll promise; now tell me."

"You are not to mention it even to my mother."

"No, no one. I wish he was here, and I'm certain that he'd tell without any fuss. Has anyone left him money?"

"Oh, he has lots of that already. No, it ain't anything like that. Now, you're not to tell Charles, and you're not to tell anyone else; isn't that quite understood?"

"Yes; do pray, tell me.

"Well, I think Charles is going to be married."

"Oh!" she said, coldly enough. "Not at all an unlikely thing—I always thought he *would* marry—but why should he make such a secret of it?"

"Because he's not quite sure that the young lady will say 'yes;' but *I* am, and he'll be married in four or five weeks."

"I'm sure he'll be very happy, and he has kept his secret very well. Dear me, isn't

there more smoke than usual from the mountain?"

"No, it's only the light."

"And, I forget, did you say who the young lady is?" said Miss Challys, carelessly, still looking toward the distant Vesuvius.

"No, I daren't tell her name, but she is as nice a girl as ever you saw. They were in the same hotel with you two months ago; in Rome you never saw a prettier creature. Do you remember, when we were passing through Rome, you told me that Charles was absent two or three hours every day on pretence of sketching, and that you saw very little to show for the time—how I laughed! I knew the thing was going on then."

"I suppose so; he has been very secret."

"Very sly," laughed Lord Ardenbroke.

"Although, of course, there was no reason why he should be in any particular hurry to tell; and I'm sure we had no right to look for disclosures earlier than other people. I'm sure, I hope he'll be very

happy, but I think he's making rather a fool of himself."

Ardenbroke laughed—"Really?"

"Yes; why should you laugh? He need not have been in any hurry, that I can see. He had time enough, goodness knows; and I think anyone who is so entirely his own master, and leading so happy a life, *is* rather a fool to change everything, and put his happiness in another person's keeping."

"I see here the spirit of the 'virgin Queen' ascendant. No courtier permitted to marry."

Ardenbroke laughed as he said this, but Miss Gray, so far from laughing, or even smiling, looked rather bored, and then talked about something else.

And so they chatted through this slow, luxurious sail; and when they landed in the punt, Charles Mannering was waiting to take her cloak and book, and contrived to look so innocent that Ardenbroke could not forbear smiling as he caught her eye. But she either did not see, or did not choose

to see, and gave her parasol and book to Lord Ardenbroke; and when she was obliged to see Charles Mannering, she gave him a rather chilly smile, and said, "Writing letters at home, I suppose?"

"Writing letters, yes; how did you find that out?"

But she did not answer; and looking seaward, made some remarks, instead, to Lord Ardenbroke, upon the peculiar green tint of the water, which Charles did not very well hear; and she passed him by, and walked upstairs, when they got home, in rather a stately way.

When she reached her room, she locked the door, and threw herself into a chair, and—wept.

"I thought I had one friend—one friend —and I've lost him—good old Charlie;—I have no one now."

And on this theme she wept for a time. Then recollecting, she dried her tears, and bathed her eyes and cheeks, to remove the appearance of recent weeping, and came down more cheerfully than she had

for a long time, and was very gay and chatty at tea. But, somehow, Charles fancied himself a little in disgrace.

The gentlemen went out after tea for a stroll and a cigar. Julia Wardell sat at an open window looking affably at the distant sea, and babbling to her dog; and Challys Gray found herself sitting beside the old dowager Lady Ardenbroke, who said—

"It was quite delightful, my dear, to listen to you this evening."

"Why, what did I say?"

"Nothing very particular; but you seem to have found your spirits again."

"Found them, have I? I was not aware that I had lost them," said Challys.

"Come, come, my dear, I'm a shrewd old woman; I have heard more than you think," and she laughed and shook her head.

"I really don't know what you mean," said Challys, first blushing very brilliantly, and then growing very pale.

"You ought to tell me that kind of nonsense, my dear, instead of allowing it to

prey upon your spirits; every foolish little fancy, if one broods over it in solitude, grows into the dimensions of a tragedy. You ought to talk with me; you can't, you know, to Mrs. Wardell, because—though she's a good old soul—she's stupid, and she could not understand you."

"But who, dear Lady Ardenbroke, has been telling you all these stories about me?"

"My dear, I've heard quite enough from that good, dull creature who is talking to her dog in the window, to understand—though she doesn't—that there was a very foolish little fancy that ought to have been quite forgotten in as many weeks as it has taken years——"

"You mean——" began Challys, with her eyes fixed on the carpet.

"I *do*," said the old lady, "and I can tell you that anything so wild and silly as your allowing yourself to *think* of such a person as Mr. de Beaumirail, even at the best—so vain, selfish, violent, and unprincipled——"

"Oh, no, no, *no!* you *must*n't—I can't bear it! You never knew him. He sacrificed himself for me."

"Well, dear, if you will have it so, and that it pains you my talking so plainly, I'll only say, that if you had consulted me, I should have warned you instantly; and I now tell you that if he had not owed a guinea, and been just as when he came of age, no one who took the least interest in you would have allowed you to dream of him as a husband; he never could have made anyone happy, and there is no good in our affecting to think differently from everyone who knew him. Ardenbroke knew him at one time very well, and, though he thought him amusing, he knew perfectly well that he was everything I describe him; and although he had lost sight of him for years, and knew nothing of the *utter* ruin that had befallen him, I do assure you he was in an agony to get back from Scotland all that time, and I could not make out for what; and only that he was kept there in spite of himself, and not able to put off people, he

would have come up to town about it; and Heaven only knows what might have happened, for he, in his own way, is just as fiery as De Beaumirail was, and the idea of putting such a person in comparison with that nice, honest, gentle creature, Charles Mannering—I think you must have been bereft of your senses! Charles Mannering is such a gentleman, and such a charming companion, and so good-natured—I could really almost beat you."

"Well, darling, I'll not talk any more, for it's all a retrospect now, and you know I've settled that I'm to be an old maid."

And with a smile, and a very deep sigh, she pointed Lady Ardenbroke's attention away from such things, to the brilliant moonlight that was quivering on the waters beneath them.

That night Lord Ardenbroke found himself at the window beside Challys Gray, just before his good night, and he whispered, laughing, "Well, have you made out anything more about Charles?"

"Oh, no; I shouldn't think of ask-

ing; of course we'll have it all in good time."

"Well, I do think, though, he might have told you; he doesn't know, I assure you, that I gave you the least hint, but you are such old friends."

"Oh, really, there's no hurry," said the young lady; "why should there? Besides, the young lady, whoever she is, might like to choose who's to hear it all first."

"Well, I'm going home now, and he'll have time to cool by morning, so I don't care if he's a little angry; and I give you leave to tell him, after I've gone, if you like it. I suppose he's a little shy. Good night!"

And away he went, and said a word or two to Charles at the door. She fancied he was advising a confidence to her; she did not quite know how she felt; her pride was wounded; but, also, she was resolved that he should not think she cared; and, therefore, when he came near the window, with a remark about the sea and the moonlight, she managed to receive him very nearly in

"Not till this day week, I think."

"Oh! Isn't that a mistake?"

"How? I don't see," he said.

"I always think, when one has to make a journey, it is better to start as soon as possible, particularly when it is going to be a pleasant journey."

"Pleasant? I did not say it was to be pleasant."

"Oh! but I heard all about it," said Challys. "Dear me! what a noise that little dog makes."

"But do you mean you really heard anything? What *did* you hear?"

"Of course you know what I heard; you told it all to Ardenbroke, and Ardenbroke told it to me."

"Ardenbroke! I told him nothing," answered Charles.

"Oh, nonsense, you did," said Challys,

lighting up suddenly with a little flush and brilliant eyes; "you told him you were going to England to marry, or rather to try to marry some one; and I'm sure there's no need to make such a fuss about nothing, or next to nothing."

"And you believe all that nonsense?" he said, after a moment's silence, looking straight at her with kind and sad eyes. "I did not think, Challys, you thought me so—I can't find exactly a word; but I thought you were the last person in the world who could have believed such a story."

"I don't know; I don't see anything so incredible in it."

"Yes, Challys, you do—that is, if you know and understand me ever so little—you must see that it is *quite* incredible—you must see that I hate going away, even for two or three weeks, and that my only happiness is to be near you."

She looked at him with still that blush, and with the half-quenched fire in her eyes, timidly almost, and lowered her eyes again.

"You are very kind, Charlie, to say so, for I'm sure I've been often very cross and very ungrateful."

At this point I hear nothing but the snarling of the dog and the nonsensical caresses of good Julia Wardell. I don't approach the two young people, who carry on their colloquy in the same low tone, I verily believe, without so much as being conscious of the noise that Mrs. Wardell and her dog are kicking up.

Half an hour goes by, and half an hour more, during which Julia Wardell, at her window, has been taking a nap. The dog is lying on his cushion, coiled round with his head to his tail, and one eye vigilantly watching Charles Mannering's back, with an air of covert suspicion. The young people are still talking very low, and can I believe my eyes!—Charles Mannering has stolen his hand slily round Challys Gray's slender waist—and there seems no resistance; and they whisper on and on—and he actually kisses her—once, twice, thrice; and I know not how often the indiscretion

might have been repeated, had not Mrs. Wardell, waking suddenly, said—

"Were you speaking to me, dear?"

"*I?* No, darling," answered Challys's voice from the other window; and in obedience to some imperious signal, I suppose, Charles Mannering's hand stole slily to his own side, and he said, quite innocently, "Can I do anything, Mrs. Wardell?"

"No, thanks," answered that lady; "but, dear me, how the candles have burnt down—how the time goes while one's thinking, and that exquisite view—and—is it really?—upon my life, it is nearly one o'clock! My *dear* Challys, what have we been thinking of? we can't live without sleep. Mr. Mannering, don't you think—it's very rude of me—but isn't it very late?"

So Charles apologized, and looked at his watch and laughed, and bid good night, and had another little whisper with Challys at the window, and bid good night again, and then another whispering word, and so good night once more, and now really departed.

But he might have been seen, as the old novels say, for ever so long after, walking slowly to and fro under the trees, and looking up at the windows of the house, in a rapture, in a dream, with a heart tumultuous with pride.

Next morning at breakfast Charles Mannering mentioned that he had put off his visit to England, and as the ladies did not care for the yacht that day, Charles went off with Ardenbroke, and during their sail, I fancy, had a good deal to tell him.

Challys Gray had also something to tell, and surprised Mrs. Wardell, and afterwards drove out with old Lady Ardenbroke, who returned in very genial spirits.

I need not, I think, lead the reader on to a sequel which so palpably announces itself.

That kind person who has listened to my story for so long, would hardly find patience were I to hold him for five minutes more by the button while filling his ear with details which he is quite willing to take for granted, and which I must confess have nothing unusual in them. Happy the

people whose annals are dull — married folks especially. The uncertainties, agitations, suspenses, and catastrophes, which are the life of romance, and the natural fare of lovers, are by no means compatible with the possibility of domestic happiness and decorum.

To say, then, that in their married state the lives of Challys Gray and Charles Mannering were as happy as mortal could desire, is simply to say that no reader would care to look into those comfortable chapters of biography.

I may mention, however, as particular contributions to that happiness, that their union has been blessed with five fair children, and it will be a comfort to those good souls who love Debrett, and cognate studies, to learn that Charles Mannering is within one of a Peerage by one of those sudden, oblique descents which demonstrate that *Death*, that utterly democratic officer, knocks as sharply at great houses as at small, and arrests an heir apparent and an heir presumptive with as little ceremony as

he would two tailors. Charles Mannering's old bachelor uncle has now the title. Some people say he is going to marry. Others as positively say no. But Charles as resolutely keeps the matter out of his mind; and I should not be surprised any day at hearing that he was now Lord Weybroke.

THE END.

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